

*By the same author*

DOWN PEACOCK'S FEATHERS

REINHOLD NIEBUHR: PROPHET FROM AMERICA

ON TO ORTHODOXY

SECULAR ILLUSION

# THE SIN OF OUR AGE

by

D. R. DAVIES

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I  
DEDICATE THIS BOOK  
TO  
RACHEL & RICHARD





## PREFACE

THE book which follows originated in a course of addresses that I gave at St. Mary's Church, Lowgate, Hull, as far back as 1942. I repeated the course, with certain amplifications, at St. Nicholas, the parish church of Liverpool, in 1945. It is these lectures which form the core of this book. Perhaps not even the core, but only a point of departure. I have long reflected on the theme of the growing secularization of European civilization, and, rightly or wrongly, I am impressed and troubled by what certainly seems to me a gravely inadequate realization of its peril to all our Western values and traditions. The mounting tragedy of the events of the last few years has but intensified that impression. I have tried here to indicate wherein the peril of secularization resides.

My obligations are too numerous to acknowledge in detail. Many of them will become obvious to the reader whose habit of reading extends to footnotes. But I must not fail to express my warmest thanks to my friends, Mr. F. A. Voigt, Editor of the *Nineteenth Century*; Mr. Douglas Jerrold, editor of the *New English Review*; and the Revs. W. A. Kelk and C. O. Rhodes, editors of the *Record*, who have all so kindly permitted me to make use of matter which I first contributed to their pages. I feel also that I must express my appreciation to my secretary, Miss Margaret von Hodenberg, whose care and thoroughness with the manuscript were beyond praise.

D. R. DAVIES.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE MEANING OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

IDEAS proverbially die hard. Indeed, in a sense it may be said that, like old soldiers, they never die, but simply fade away. Ideas seem to bear a charmed life. They apparently are invulnerable against all attack, especially the attack of evidence. They finally fade away only when the attacks upon them exhaust themselves. One idea, in particular, which is reluctant even to fade away, is the peculiarly capitalist, protestant idea of self-contained individualism, that men exist as separate, isolated individuals, that the individual is a microcosmos in himself. This idea is the root, or one of the roots, from which has grown the theory of national sovereignty, which implies that a nation is self-existent. This same idea, which translates itself into politics as national sovereignty, is expressed in religion and theology as a doctrine of individual atonement. Christ died not for humanity as a unity, but for the world as a sum total of individuals. Christ died for men as separate beings.

This idea is ceasing to have any validity whatsoever in our modern situation of interdependence achieved by technology. It once played a notable part in the development of the sense of individuality. With the rise of the Renaissance, as Burckhardt has shown, there came a new realization of individual consciousness, which, in its protest against the Feudal idea of status and function, went to the extreme of individual self-sufficiency. In due course this hardened into a doctrine, a theory, which dominated ethical values for a long period. The achievement of scientific industrialism, however, which has externally

unified mankind, has emptied this theory of all relevance. To talk of the individual as being self-contained in an age which has socialized the processes of production is plainly foolish. What is the sense of saying that the individual is an isolated existence, when the making of even a pin necessitates a world-wide labour co-operation? Accumulated facts have throttled such a theory.

The two most characteristic literary products of the theory of independent individuality were Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Smiles' *Self-Help*, which are still read! I once saw a really fantastic example of this in Spain. During the civil war, I spent an afternoon with Republican officers in the aerodrome at Santander. A young officer proudly showed me the book he was reading to perfect his English. It was Smiles' *Self-Help*! The incongruity of it made me laugh. Here was an educated young Spanish socialist, in the midst of a civil war in which men were killing one another for differences in ideas, perfecting his English on a capitalist classic! He was prepared to give his life in defence of the dogma that the individual is a social being, and he was perfecting his English by a book teaching the exact opposite, by a book which was asserting the idea of man as an isolated individual. In both Defoe and Smiles' books, society was assumed to be merely the aggregate of individuals.

Of course, society is nothing of the kind. That men exist as separate individuals is the delusion of an adolescent, vigorous capitalism, in which the contradictions of competition have still to be worked out. Men, in fact, exist only in groups, tribes, communities and nations. Communities are not formed by the gradual coalescence or aggregation of individuals. On the contrary, it is individuals who slowly become aware of themselves as distinct entities within their group or tribe. Individuality—the

consciousness of oneself as a distinct person—is a comparatively late product of social development.<sup>1</sup>

In primitive society, men had no consciousness of themselves as existing apart from the tribe. The memory of this state of human development is preserved among Slav communities, such as Russia, in the names they give to their children. Every child has three names at least—his own proper name, his surname (family name) and a patronymic, which consists of his father's name plus a suffix, meaning "son of". Thus Trotsky (Trotsky was a party name, his family name was Bronstein) was named Leon Davidovitch Trotsky (Bronstein). Davidovitch meant son of David. Every Russian apparently still has a middle name ending in "vitch". It denotes identity with the tribe. And that is the basic fact in human society. Men live only in and through societies, and are therefore fundamentally social. They never live as isolated, separate individuals.

It is this fact which constitutes the significance and importance of nations and civilizations. They are the framework within which, by a divine providence, mankind undergoes its discipline in preparation for another world. Thus a study and understanding of the history of civiliza-

<sup>1</sup> A recent writer, Erich Kahler, has made the suggestive point that, in the interests of a more exact sociology, the term "collective" should be confined to the description of modern societies, which embody in themselves the results of the process in which the individual came to the realization of himself as a distinct being. In pre-modern society, the individual is hardly aware of himself as an individual. Society which is characterized by individuals aware of their individuality should alone be described as collective. "The first kind of community, the pre-individual community, is adequately characterized by the term 'species', and the second kind, the post-individual community, is best expressed by the term 'collective'." Modern sociologists frequently apply the term 'collective' to all kinds of communities, a use which is likely to lead to confusion. This term is properly applicable only to the post-individual community, since collecting means the gathering and putting-together of different and previously existent individual entities. Thus collectivity pre-supposes individuals who may collect." (*Vide Man the Measure*, p. 20. Published by Jonathan Cape. 1945.)



tions is of the greatest theological importance. There is, of course, no need whatever to argue the vast importance of the study of civilization for politics. But, for all its importance, the political aspect of civilization is secondary; for politics is but instrumental for personality. Civilization is the preordained social form of human existence in this world. It is the order in which man achieves personality. Hence, the profoundest significance of civilization is theological.

On the whole, men and women are conditioned by the society in which they live. They are unconsciously moulded by the civilization of which they are a part. This was what the late Archbishop Temple meant when he insisted that the greatest educational agency is not the school, but the social environment, the sum total of social institutions. The more decisive part of education is unconscious. It operates by a process of mimesis—*i.e.*, by a process of unconscious imitation by the mass of the dominant ideas and ideals. A member of a primitive tribe, for instance, believes that every tree has a soul. But a member of a modern "collective" society has come to believe that nothing has a soul, not even man. He has largely ceased to believe in the existence of the soul at all. This is boxing the compass with a vengeance. Man has "progressed" from the belief that everything has soul to the wonderful idea that nothing has soul, which is not only throwing out the baby with the bath-water, but the bath as well. In the one case, man is supposed to be superstitious. In the other, he is an enlightened rationalist.

Now, it is true, of course, that primitive man didn't sit down to argue the matter out to a logical conclusion. His brow was not contracted by concentration of thought. He did not go on excursions to observe the behaviour of trees. What happened was that he found the belief in soulful trees

prevalent and dominant in the society of his time, and he fell into its obsession as easily and naturally as a duck takes to water. It is the peculiar superstition of our age that beliefs are generally arrived at only after a rational process of investigation, observation, comparison, etc.; that only those beliefs that can be "proved" are entertained. Hence, those confident young secularists one meets have, presumably, thoroughly examined the problems of historical evidence and philosophical speculation involved in Christianity; and have decided on evidence that Christianity is not true. This would be marvellous if it were so. In fact, in its falsity, it is still more marvellous. The reality by no means accords with this fairy-picture.

The typical modern rationalist does, in fact, accept, with as little reflection as the primitive savage (if as much), the dominant and intellectually fashionable influences of his own time. How many rationalists, for instance, have explored or challenged the dogma of the supremacy of reason, pondered over its contradictions? This dogma (for which history affords no warrant), that reason is capable of appropriating absolute truth, has become the very air breathed by the modern man. The rationalist generally accepts this dogma with as little investigation as the savage accepts whatever superstition he happens on. As individuals we enter upon a vast social heritage, and appropriate it all unconsciously. We drink it in with our mother's milk. We, of course, persuade ourselves that we are different from the benighted generations of the past. *We* are governed by reason, pure and undefiled. But alas! it is too late in the day to get away with that fond delusion. Secular psychologists—*e.g.*, Freud—have effectively exposed that particular one. We are, like human beings in every period of the world's history, unconsciously dominated by the society in which we live, and of which we are a part.

So the individual is, to a very large extent, what his society is. Find out the nature of the particular civilization, and you will discover broadly what the individual also is like, in his ideas and ideals, his beliefs and principles, his values and purposes.

Now here, in this little volume, we are setting ourselves to discover, if we can, the *sin* of our Western civilization. I emphasize this word "sin". The theme of our argument is not just the defect, or the error, or even the falsity of our civilization, but its *sin*, which implies an element of responsibility and guilt. It also involves a specific interpretation of modern history. It assumes that the final causes of the crises and disasters of our era are to be sought in the realm of the relation between man and God. It lifts the whole discussion of our civilization from the level of sociology to that of theology. Any proposed solution inevitably develops into terms of repentance. It is, indeed, only on the level of theology that any talk of repentance becomes rational and intelligible, and, further, anything less than repentance is meaningless.

Repentance, not just intelligence, is Europe's vital need to-day. The current assumption that what the world chiefly suffers from is stupidity is utterly inadequate and shallow. The impotence of modern man does not lie in the mind, in logic and knowledge. We all *knew* in 1918 that another war would be a most dreadful, devastating business. But our knowledge did not prevent the development of a situation which inevitably involved war. To attribute the ills of our time to stupidity is a false diagnosis. The trouble is much deeper down. It lies in the abysmal heart and will of self-centred man. Much of the stupidity which afflicts us is the necessary consequence of corrupted, perverted will. The cure for that lies outside the scope of education.

This is not a piece of mere theological prejudice or just another example of ecclesiastical cant. It is not the "incantation" (to quote Prof. Laski's overworked vocabulary) of a cult. It is a grim, sober realism, and Mr. Victor Gollancz has turned preacher and prophet. In a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* (August 24th, 1945), he pleaded for repentance as Europe's greatest need to-day. The lurid glare of the atomic bomb which exploded in Hiroshima revealed to Mr. Gollancz the deep hiding-place of our contemporary disease. And Mr. Gollancz is not alone among the prophets. In that company we find also Mr. Arthur Koestler and Mr. Lewis Mumford. They, too, are talking in terms of repentance.

Civilizations, however, do not and cannot repent. Repentance is not an institutional possibility. Committees, councils, commissions are all estimable organizations, no doubt, but they cannot repent as *committees*. It would sound incongruous if a resolution were adopted "that the Committee for X.Y.Z. repents in dust and ashes". Nobody would believe it, anyhow, least of all the members of the Committee. Only persons can repent.

But what is the content of repentance? That is a profoundly important question in the context of the present condition of Western civilization. Repentance involves responsibility. We cannot repent for what we are not responsible for. But am I, a single individual, responsible for the sin of Europe to-day? The obvious answer would seem to be that I am not. On equally valid grounds every other individual could also deny any personal responsibility. So we arrive at one of two positions: (a) that nobody is responsible or (b) that only a handful of politicians is responsible, or at most Germany. That will never do. That only intensifies the very evil afflicting civilization—namely, the too ready tendency to contract out of responsi-

bility. It only makes us still more expert in "passing the buck".

It will be a profound revolution, a super-historic revolution, if men and women without distinction of class or function can be brought to realize that the condition of society is their personal responsibility. Before God we all bear some degree of responsibility and guilt for the degradation into which Europe has sunk. The precise degree is a matter of only secondary importance. The supreme thing is the acknowledgement of a responsibility. That, in itself, would act with the force of a spiritual rocket to lift our civilization to a new level. It would check the drift of the individual into inertia, to loss of validity, to individual submission to fate. Without staying to argue the degree of the individual's responsibility, which God alone can assess, let each one admit that the condition of civilization is an element in personal responsibility. That alone would dam the flood of totalitarianism.

This recognition of responsibility necessitates, at least, some knowledge of what constitutes the sin of contemporary Western civilization which is our effective environment. We cannot repent for humanity at large. That is too vague, too diffuse, too ghostly. It reduces repentance to unreality. Diffusion merely results in confusion. We only know mankind in a concrete, specific setting, in the society of which we ourselves are a part. We cannot repent for Egyptian civilization which is dead and gone. The spectacle of some royal mummy in the British Museum may inspire us with any number of emotions, of which, however, repentance will not be one. We cannot repent for Genghiz Khan, for Tamerlane, for Cyrus or Alexander. We cannot repent even for Feudal or Catholic Europe, which needs it less than does modern Europe. Our repentance, if it is to be genuine, must be concrete, specific and contemporary. It must be

for the things that we know; for the ideals, beliefs and values which shape *our* lives, here and now. In short, we must be quite clear what we mean when we talk about Western civilization. What, then, do we connote by the term "Western civilization"?

The history of our world is not simply a history of isolated nations, races and peoples, but of nations or communities in relation to one another. The history of what historians call the Ancient World—*i.e.*, the ancient East—is not the record of Egypt, Babylonia, etc., in self-contained isolation, but rather the story of a more or less single social system, of which Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, etc., formed constituent parts. This single social system was the totality of relationships between these different communities. A social system (civilization) simply means the sum total of institutions in which a given number of communities share. So in the ancient world, *e.g.*, a specific number of peoples had dealings with one another in different ways. These inter-relations took the form of evolving institutions and organized routine. Imperial Rome, for instance, depended on Egypt for its corn supply. This trade had to be organized, and this involved money payment and exchanges, military protection, taxation, etc. Now, all these activities together constituted a social system, a civilization, which is, therefore, the outward and visible symbol that no individual or people can live unto himself or itself alone, however much they try. Some nations have tried hard, especially in recent years. Hitler's autarky and Stalin's type of socialism are examples. But it never works. It never has worked. It never will work—a fact which those troglodytes, the isolationists of the United States, continue to disbelieve. Even in the most primitive conditions, where means of communication are at the minimum, nations are driven into contact and relationship with one

another by the grim necessities of geography and hunger. Desert and mountain and sea, which operate as the most formidable obstacles to inter-communication, are nevertheless overcome. These are Nature's challenge. Civilization is man's response to the challenge, as Dr. Arnold Toynbee has so brilliantly demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> In Greece, the mountains created the City-State. In Asia, the desert created the City Empire. In Europe, the sea has created a nation-Empire. Hence, the very word "civilization" has a profound, theological meaning. It disguises the divine will and purpose, which has made humanity to be one and indivisible. "For God hath made of one blood all nations . . ."

Now, our Western civilization is rooted in the civilization of Greece and Rome, which was indeed a very wonderful civilization. Latterly it comprehended within a single system of law and order the most diverse races and nations. Much has been said, with truth, about the cruelty, injustice and exploitation which characterized and marred the vast Empire of the Cæsars. But in spite of all that, it was a wonderful triumph in many ways. Surveying the heroic achievement of the ancient Romans, it is not difficult to sympathize with Barbellion's dictum, "We men are a great little breed, after all". The whole of the Mediterranean, from Spain in the West to Asia Minor in the East, lived an ordered life under a single system of law and authority. It was a civilization which witnessed the rise and diffusion of a marvellous culture, much of which is still unsurpassed. But, more important still, it saw the beginning and growth of Christianity. It was those magnificent Roman roads, built originally to facilitate military conquest and exploitation, which made the spread of the Christian Gospel possible. What an ironic humorist Almighty God must be!

This civilization, with its schools and colleges and libra-

<sup>1</sup> Vide *A Study of History*, Vol. I, pp. 271-338.

ries, its law and order, its universal citizenship, was finally overwhelmed by the Teutonic Barbarian invasions from the central forests of Germany and the savage East-German aggression has a long history. (It is interesting to note, in passing, that Germany alone among civilized nations boasts about her barbarian origins.) The barbaric ancestors of contemporary Germans completed the destruction of Rome that was begun by her own inner corruption. But by that time, the beginning of the fifth century A.D., a completely new power, and an unprecedented kind of power, had entered into the world and established itself—the Church. It was this power that succeeded in preserving what was preserved of the fruits of Hellenistic civilization. The Church, too, was the power that tamed the barbarian hordes that overran the Empire; that laboriously and painfully disciplined them into a new civilization, the Feudal order of early medieval Europe. The Church welded these diverse, semi-savage races into a single, European society, held together within a framework of personal relationship based upon land-tenure, and within which also power was restrained by the conflict between the Papacy and Holy Roman Empire. It was a stupendous achievement, which reveals, among other things, that the modern secular statesman is a miserable amateur compared with the Catholic Church of the West. The conflict between Papacy and Empire prevented power from becoming absolute and kept governments penned within the limits of a recognized law. But this civilization also came to an end in due course, though much of it was safely ferried over into its successor civilization, which is our modern Western civilization. Though related in many ways to medieval, Feudal society, and sharing some of its ideas and institutions, our civilization, which has come to be designated as “Western civilization”, is, nevertheless, quite distinct and different. It is literally



a new society. It is of this society that we to-day are the heirs and transmitters. By it we have been moulded and shaped. This civilization, into the making of which have gone Greek culture, Roman law and Feudal order, has been guilty of a great sin, which has been the fatal root of our tragedy and disasters.

We cannot point to any one outstanding event or series of related events which can be said to have ended Feudal society and ushered in our modern Western civilization. There are no new beginnings in history. We cannot put our hands on a definite fact like the Barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire, and say: "This is what destroyed medieval Europe; this or that is what brought modern civilization to birth". But the two civilizations are, nevertheless, indubitably distinct and different. The three outstanding events, or congeries of events, of modern civilization are the Renaissance, the Reformation and the French Revolution. These were the pre-eminent symbols of a new way of life, of a new orientation in men's minds and hearts.

Western civilization is distinguished from preceding civilizations by three features at least.

First, it is universal in extent. For the first time in the history of mankind, every nation and people in the world to-day is comprehended within a single civilization. In no single instance in the past has any civilization been co-terminous with the whole of mankind. All civilizations in the past have been only local, like the Roman Empire, for instance. They related together in trade, culture and politics only a part of the peoples and races of the world. Always there lived outside their scope other peoples, so that at any one time several civilizations existed independently of one another in the same world. Hence the disintegration or destruction of one civilization did not

carry fatal possibilities for all humanity. But to-day Western civilization is supreme, dominant and universal. No people can live outside its sphere. The world holds no refuge for those who may want to escape from the toils and penalties of Western society. Its tentacles hold within its grasp primitive tribes, as in Africa and the South Seas, as well as highly civilized nations like France and the United States. Thus, whilst other civilizations still maintain themselves, they do so only within the orbit of Western civilization and on its sufferance. By the exploitation of tropical resources and the consequent development of imperialism, the most backward peoples are forced into relationship with the most advanced. Thus the world is to-day one community. It participates in the same material consumption and shares the same political idea. The dusky maiden of the Trobru tribe, like her sister in the West End, also calls on the aid of chemical cosmetics to improve on nature. To-day the Colonel's lady and Judith O'Grady are sisters *above* their skins, as well as under them. Western civilization has welded the whole world into a mechanical, external unity.

The second feature of our civilization is the progressive substitution of human energy by solar energy, and now by atomic energy, which ushers in a cosmic revolution, as the dominant labour or productive power. One plays occasionally with the fantasy of a visit to a modern city by Plato. What would strike him as really new to him? In all probability it would be the motor-car. In Plato's experience, all vehicles had been propelled or drawn by externally embodied power. In the motor-car, the internal-combustion engine, we have the symbol of the vast technological revolution of our time, by which man is ceasing to be the chief source of productive energy, with consequences of profound significance for society. The mechanization of

production has vastly increased man's power of material consumption, and this has resulted in a considerable degree of mechanization of culture and personality. So far, at least, technology has bred the terrible phenomenon of the Mass-Man, who has made possible the destruction of established values and moral sanctions. The technological revolution of our time has invested matter with a new value, which is proving deadly to the spirit of man. It is the source of the enormously extended power of man over Nature. In the engines of a Halifax bomber, for instance, there is the concentrated muscular force of 24,000 men. It absolutely distinguishes our Western civilization from all preceding societies, in which man himself was the main source of productive power.

The third distinguishing feature is the domination of culture by science, to which, of course, we owe the vast technical mastery of the modern world. This is the profoundly significant *cultural* differentiation of our civilization from every other, and especially from medieval civilization. The worship of science in our time, behind which is concealed our obsession with what D. H. Lawrence called "the bitch-goddess, Success", has become so tyrannical, that any hint of doubt of science damns the doubter as an obscurantist, a reactionary and other dreadful things. In spite of the acceleration of the progress of our civilization to hell, it still requires an almost superhuman courage to challenge the domination of science. Nobody could justly accuse Mr. C. S. Lewis of timidity in the presence of the dragon of modern secular thought, but even he is a little fearful when it comes to standing up to the cultural domination of science.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Perhaps in the nature of things, analytical understanding must always be a basilisk which kills what it sees and only sees by killing. But if the scientists themselves cannot arrest this process before it reaches the Common Reason and kills that too, then someone else must arrest it. What I most

Our civilization has transferred Science, which is a method of investigation, into a philosophy, into a dogmatic, material affirmation about the nature of Reality, the significance of which has hardly yet been even canvassed, let alone been realized. Since Science is primarily a method for investigating Nature, objects perceptible by the senses, and for the development of this method into an instrument for subordinating Nature to the human will, the assumption that Reality is identical with what Science perceives (and this is the assumption of Science turned philosophy) issues into the following dreadful position : *that ultimate, final Reality is subordinate to man*. In other words, Man is the Absolute. God exists to fulfil human purpose. Divine Spirit is ethereal petrol to propel the automobile of man's progress. It is a ghastly position. It destroys every single bastion defending the dignity and liberty of the individual. This, let it be repeated, is the consequence, not of a method of investigating matter, *but of assuming that what is perceived by this method is the final Reality of existence*.

Western civilized man is reproducing primitive mentality on a higher level. He is identifying magic with religion. The primitive witch-man claimed to control the spirits. Modern science is a more successful *short-term* magic. I invite the reader to note the short-term aspect of scientific success. Science exploits the invisible powers, demons, call them what we will, brilliantly. It wins great victories which, however, turn out to be Pyrrhic victories. They create conditions which frustrate the very things won by Science. The atomic bomb, for instance, suspends the very physical existence of mankind upon a thread.

Science, therefore, in the guise of philosophy, intensifies

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fear is the reply that I am 'only one more' obscurantist, that this barrier, like all previous barriers set up against the advance of science, can be safely passed." *The Abolition of Man*, p. 39. By C. S. Lewis (Geoffrey Bles, Ltd.).

the very thing which bedevils all our life—pride. It feeds man's appetite for power and tends to banish mystery. Medieval Europe was dominated by philosophy and theology, which oppress man with a sense of mystery and of the inscrutable. Science intensifies the sense of human omniscience, and so fortifies pride.

Here, then, is a bird's-eye view, so to say, of Western civilization, which has to its credit the most colossal achievements of human creative genius, together with the most disastrous failures. Both in its triumphs and its disasters it is built on the heroic, giant scale. But, for all its mighty, dazzling achievements, Western civilization is the Satan among civilizations. It alone has committed the Titanic sin. In its progress, humanity has suffered the Second Fall of Man.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ROOT SIN OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

ANYBODY can see that there is a vast difference between our Western civilization and the medieval European society which it succeeded. The difference is visible to the naked eye. We can see it in the very physical structure of our towns and cities and even villages. We can see it in the dominant and characteristic institutions of contemporary society. We can see it in such obvious and simple things as clothes. Mr. Lewis Mumford has commented upon the great contrast in colour between medieval and modern dress, and upon the significance of this contrast for spiritual values. There can be no doubt whatever that medieval and modern Europe represent two really different worlds. The obvious external differences are significant of profound inner changes in the mind and spirit of Western man.

The transition from medieval to modern Europe took place in the Renaissance, that vast movement of humanistic learning and artistic activity, which was a product of Medievalism. There has been a considerable change in the estimate of the Renaissance, due to a more just and historical appreciation of the character of Medieval civilization. It is becoming plain, for instance, that there is an element of absurdity in describing the Renaissance as a recovery of Greek learning and culture when we remember the dominant influence of Aristotle in Scholasticism. This view of the Renaissance is influenced by the assumption (for it is nothing more) that the Middle Ages were superstitious. The trouble with medieval, Catholic Europe, was its excessive rationality, as Professor A. N. Whitehead has

made clear.<sup>1</sup> The Renaissance, in its first phase, was a typical expression of medieval rationality. It was the product of the twelfth century, the "Golden Century". The description of this first phase by Catholic historians as "Christian Humanism" is roughly accurate.

It was in its second phase, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that the humanism of the Renaissance ceased to be Christian and became predominantly secular. It was this phase of the Renaissance—Renaissance in decline—which gave to modern civilization its tone and character. Together with the Reformation and French Revolution, it constituted the outstanding feature of our Western society as distinguished from the medieval. The greatest political and social event in medieval civilization, in all probability, was the conflict between the Empire and the Papacy, which was a conflict conducted within a framework of law. In this it contrasts with our civilization, in which power-conflicts have degenerated into the denial of law. In the medieval conflict, the Papacy triumphed, but its triumph was costly, not only to itself, but to Christian civilization. It was also short-lived. If defeat can contain the seed of victory, then victory can be a prelude to disaster—as it proved to be in this case. Pope Innocent III was literally innocent of any intention of preparing the way for Luther and the German Protestant princes. But by the irony of history, that is what he did. He prepared the way for the dissolution of medieval civilization into another of a vastly different kind. Between the two civilizations, as I have said, there is a radical difference. For the appreciation of this difference we hardly need brains. Eyesight will be enough. The architecture of the two civilizations will serve as an example.

Civilizations are marked, amongst other features, by

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Science and the Modern World*, p. 68.

characteristic architectural types. Egypt, for instance, was symbolized by the pyramid, which testified to the longing for security and survival. So medieval civilization was symbolized by the cathedral, especially the Gothic cathedral, which advertised more plainly than words the spiritual character of medieval man. It embodies his aspiration for God. It conveyed to the eye medieval man's inner awareness of the reality of God. Medieval craft, therefore, naturally and spontaneously expressed itself in cathedral-building. As the nightingale expresses itself in song, so the medieval craftsman expressed himself in ecclesiastical stone. In a real sense, cathedrals were built for the fun of the thing. Into them medieval man poured his sense of the joy and significance of living. So throughout a period of five hundred years medieval society was engaged in rearing those wonderful "houses of God" in their towns and cities and even villages, veritable epics in stone. It is wonderful to come across those supreme achievements in small, obscure towns and to realize that their emotional energy and ethos still survive in an age which has almost completely departed from their spirit. Let the reader wander, for example, through Beauvais to experience this emotional survival, or stroll through the little East Riding town of Beverley.

Now, whatever may be said about our Western civilization, it is quite certain that neither the cathedral nor the church (as a building) is its architectural characteristic. Both cathedrals and churches, of course, continue to be built—but *not for the fun of the thing*. And for that reason they are different in character and emotional content from the medieval. This difference can be illustrated by the Anglican cathedral of Liverpool, which is a supreme example of modern cathedral-building. One does not need to be an expert to realize that the Liverpool cathedral is



very fine, very grand, even majestic, which is not an impression due to mere size. But, in spite of all that, it misses something, which the medieval cathedral indubitably possessed. One's emotional reaction when standing in the nave of the cathedral in Liverpool is most certainly different from what one experiences under the nave of the cathedral in Beauvais, for instance. Style doesn't account for it. One is impressed with a sense of magnificence, of super-competence in Liverpool. Those are impressions which involuntarily turn the mind to human power. But this is not the impression one gains in Beauvais. There one is overwhelmed with a sense of mystery. The qualities of the architecture become impressive only on the subsequent attempt at analysis. In Liverpool cathedral, one *appreciates*. In Beauvais, one is *lost*. Appreciation has to wait upon recovery.

Now, fundamentally, the source of this difference is to be found, I believe, in the fact that the unconscious mind of the age no longer flows into religion. Liverpool cathedral is a structure of sheer, stressful self-consciousness. It has nothing of the abysmal about it, in which, of course, it is a perfect expression of Anglican Christianity to-day, with its secular trust in the power of organization to control the Holy Ghost. (But this is only by the way.) The relevant point is that the modern process of secularization has affected the deep unconscious mind of the age, which does not go into religion, so that ecclesiastical architecture has degenerated into a secondary art-form—a form in which we are *trying* to be artistic. The same thing can be seen in the quality of modern preaching. The general lament of to-day (inside the Church, of course) is that there is no longer any great preaching. And that is true. There is no *great* preaching. Contemporary preachers do not, in my judgment, suffer by comparison with those of the great preaching

eras, whether in learning, oratorical skill, inner spiritual awareness or any other qualities that make up the preacher. But preaching is not rooted in the unconscious mind of our generation. It shares, to some extent, the self-consciousness of the modern cathedral, in which there is a touch of secularity.

The characteristic architecture of our civilization is most certainly not the cathedral. The buildings into which the unconscious mind of the age flows are purely functional—*i.e.*, those which are devoted to the organization and maintenance of the economic and social achievements of modern man. Random examples of these are banks, which nearly always occupy the best sites. They are the real religious temples of our time, if by religion we understand the dominant values. Other examples that may be mentioned are newspaper offices, blocks of flats, and industrial buildings, like power-houses. These are the structures that canalize the energy of Freud's famous (or infamous) ID.

Now, in a medieval cathedral, the mind quite spontaneously and inevitably turned to the thought of God. However careless, irresponsible or irreligious a person might be, when he stood in the dim, solemn glory of a cathedral it is the thought of God that would hold his mind, and the natural expression of that thought would be worship and adoration. That is what the medieval cathedral was built for. In Beauvais, with its soaring, mysterious nave; with the icy purity of its arches and pillars, not even the man whom Berdyaev once described as a "Bourgeois cabbage" could resist the thought of God. In a medieval cathedral, some tremor of the presence of God would penetrate the thickest skin to the thinnest soul.

What is the instinctive reaction of a modern man when he stands in a typically modern building? Take, for

instance, the electrical power-house in Battersea, with its twin chimneys. Standing in front of that building (no need to go inside), which is a splendid example of modern architecture, to what would the mind turn instinctively, not pausing to think? What could it contemplate, except Man? Man in his power, inventive genius, material glory and technical mastery. The whole lay-out and structure of the building scream the power of man. In it is bovrilized the immense, proud, fatal achievement of man. In the typically medieval building a person turned by instinct to the thought of God. In the typically modern building he turns, also by instinct, to the thought of Man. In the one God is at the centre; in the other, Man.

The same thing is true, if to a lesser degree, of other architectural modern types. Take the new Bank of England building as an instance. Without being cynical, I think it can be justly said that standing there, a man would have to be a medieval saint, or, at least, one in whom a medieval soul had incredibly survived, to think first and instinctively of God. Afterwards perhaps, by deliberate effort, he might make the sign of the Cross. But it is wildly improbable that his first reaction on entering would be any sense of divine indwelling, as Jacob felt when he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place". What is there in these sumptuous bank buildings to remind oneself of God? Not the mural texts or decorations, as for instance—"The Wigan Building Society offers you a safe 4%", which does not suggest "God is My Adventure". Safety first! The vestments which the bank priesthood wear certainly do not suggest the divine presence—black coat and grey trousers immaculately pressed. Nor do the red, shiny altars on which the Sacrament of the Golden Calf is unceasingly celebrated. The most awesome thing in the building is the glass door leading to the inner sanctum, on

which is the inscription "Manager—PRIVATE". It may have a faint suggestion of judgement or hell, but is still a long way from the thought of God. Everything points to Man, Man. "Glory to Man in the highest; for he is the master of things."

The æsthetic judgement of the art of our time is altogether irrelevant to the problem with which we are concerned here. I have no concern whatever with any æsthetic difference between cathedral and power-house or bank. I am not arguing that the one is superior or inferior as art. There is always a tendency to depreciate contemporary art in comparison with the past. "Modern art, music, painting etc., don't compare with the artistic achievement of the past." But they do. The artistic creations of a secularized civilization will compare favourably, simply as art, with those of any previous civilization. Modern architecture is æsthetically no whit inferior to medieval or classical. Modern buildings have a beauty all their own. I find it difficult to understand how anybody can deny that the severity and simplicity of line in the Battersea power-house are beautiful. But whether this be so or not is utterly irrelevant. The point I am seeking to make clear is the mental and spiritual response called forth by the medieval and modern, since it is so vital an indication of the character of the civilizations. In the medieval cathedral, men turned spontaneously in their thought to God. In the modern bank or what not, men's minds are obsessed with Man. There is the root sin of Western civilization. *It is the enthronement of Man at the centre of life, being and thought.* This centralization of humanity is to-day fully self-conscious, aggressive and definite, which is indicated by a few simple facts.

In the social movement which is supreme in Russia and Eastern Europe, and which is very nearly dominant in

Western Europe, humanity is assumed to be absolute—in *theory*. In actual practice, humanity (the mass) becomes subject to an oppressing minority. But their oppression is exercised in the name of collective humanity, which is regarded as the supreme existence. Beyond humanity, there is nothing. Man in the mass is the final criterion of law, morality and philosophy. The welfare of man, variously and strangely conceived, is the supreme good. In effect, humanity has become god. When an object or being becomes absolute, it is invested with deity. This is the conscious militant philosophy of a powerful social movement which is in the position of being able to put its philosophy into practice and to control the destinies of millions.

Man as absolute, as supreme existence, first became fully conscious in Comte's Positivism. Comte systematically formulated the idea as a religion, the worship of humanity. It was never more than the creed of a minority in the nineteenth century, though a distinguished minority. Its most distinguished English representative was Frederic Harrison. Positivism was atheistic in its philosophy, but humanist and European in its ethics. In less than a century, however, the dogma of an absolute humanity has, through Marxism, become the inspiration of vast numbers of people, no longer a cultured minority. In the process, the dogma has shed both its elements of religious cult and its European ethic. Morality has degenerated into utter relativity. Whatever can be made useful for the maintenance of the power of a minority is good, even though it be lying and corruption. The good Comte (1857) would be horrified to see into what a ghastly monster his immature Positivist ideal has grown.

Whilst this dogma of an absolute humanity may be still the creed, the professed, conscious belief of only a minority

(though a numerous minority), it is nevertheless implied in many of the ideals and values of people who would not consciously subscribe to it; who, indeed, vigorously deny it and profess a more or less theistic position. We are only too familiar with the phenomenon of a consciously-professed creed being negated by an unprofessed creed of a different kind. There are millions of Christians, for instance, who profess a belief in the existence of another world, but behave as though this world alone exists.<sup>1</sup> There are, too, thousands of Socialists who sincerely profess a faith in democracy and personal liberty, but advocate with equal sincerity policies which involve dictatorship. So there are vast numbers of men and women in our secularized society who, if challenged, would affirm a vague faith in the existence of God; but they, nevertheless, hold the values and pursue a way of life utterly inconsistent with such a faith. Indeed, their values and way of life are consistent only with the opposite of their profession, with the dogma of a humanity that is self-existent and absolute, which has become the unconscious, working faith of our Western civilization. It is precisely this semi-conscious, unadmitted character of belief in an absolute humanity which gives such terrible efficacy to the minority of conscious, militant believers in the same dogma.

The uncritical acceptance of the modern ideal of unlimited social progress is an example of the operative belief that humanity is a self-existent absolute. It has, of course, been rationalized by a Liberal theology into a Christian ideal. It is, in actual fact, the social philosophy of atheism, or, to be more exact, of a humanity endowed with deity. It is the social ethic issuing from the apotheosis of man. It is the elevation into a position of supremacy of what is secondary. That which in a right order of life is but a by-

<sup>1</sup> This profoundly important fact will be discussed in a later chapter.

product is made primary. It is necessary to emphasize this point, if only to obviate misunderstanding and misrepresentation. To deny the *primacy* of material progress is not to advocate reaction into a static society. It is merely to plead for the right co-relation between material and spiritual ends. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things"—material consumption and social progress—"shall be added unto you." To make continuous expansion of material resources the primary aim of social organization is the inevitable consequence of making humanity absolute. Material consumption is thus endowed with a false infinity. The transformation of humanity from a subordinate, created entity into an absolute, self-existing, self-evolving entity makes the exploitation of human power the highest good. From this it is but a step to the identification of the good life with increasing material consumption; which is exactly the step that has been taken by Western civilization, both in its capitalist and socialist phases. This is a deadly confusion of moral and spiritual ends, which ordains that a wrongly primary social progress creates bigger problems than it solves. The social problems which confront the world to-day are infinitely more stubborn, more intractable than any previously known. How idyllically simple seem the post-war problems of Europe in 1919 compared with those of 1946!

How rare it is to come across any challenge to the current ideal of social progress in the literature of to-day! As an ideal it is almost everywhere taken for granted. What we chiefly deplore is the difficulty and contradictions of achieving it. In essence, we have been conditioned to a world in which man is supreme and absolute. So thorough has been the process of conditioning that we are unaware of its dreadful abnormality. We are in the position of people

who have become so accustomed to foul air, that they find it painful to breathe fresh air. The foetid atmosphere has become natural.

Now, this enthronement of man, together with its consequences, did not happen overnight. It has taken centuries to ripen into maturity. Neither has it been a conscious, deliberate development. Actual consequences in the historic process are neither envisaged nor intended. Military retreats, if we believe the soldiers, are always "according to plan". Historic development, however, seldom respects those who plan it, because results generally falsify intentions, especially good intentions. Hell itself is the consequence of good intentions. It is surely rare to intend bad results. So men never begin by affirming to themselves that they will become god, either individually or collectively. They never admit that what they are doing is evil. Hitler, for instance, did not intend that Germany should suffer the greatest calamity of history. When he joined the Nazi Party in 1920, it is most improbable that he entertained then any idea of himself as a super-Napoleonic master of Europe, and, from the vantage-ground of his grip on Europe, striving to win mastery of the world. What he began with was a sincere intention to renew Germany and to throw off the shackles of Versailles. But step by step, as he acquired more and more power, he came at last to think of himself as a veritable super-man, especially when he could see that masses of the German people accepted his own estimate of himself. Finally, in the hectic brevity of supreme power, he could solemnly accept from his followers the most crazy tributes. "Adolf Hitler is the Holy Ghost," said Karl Frank. We can be quite certain that Hitler did not think of himself as the Holy Ghost in 1920. But that, or something like it, was his vision of himself twenty years later. Hitler repeated in his amazing career a characteristic



historical process, and so demonstrated the law of the irony of history, which is summed up in the proverb, "Man proposes, God disposes". By a grim inner dialectic, history is continuously falsifying and frustrating both the good and evil intentions of sinful man. By the time they come home to roost, the chickens have become birds of prey.

That is the process which has operated in the development of Western civilization from the later Renaissance to the present degradation and corruption of Europe. Nobody would have described the new tendencies in art, literature and politics that emerged in the Renaissance as tendencies towards the centralizing of man to the exclusion of God. But that is what they were. In their beginnings, these tendencies seemed innocent and innocuous. They even appeared to be good and praiseworthy and progressive. We may be sure that the Montaignes, the Mirandellos and the Von Ulrichs never suspected that out of the heady, exciting and thrilling things they were saying about man and his emancipated powers would come, at long last, the soulless Deism of the eighteenth century and the Positivism of the nineteenth, in which, as we have noted, the worship of Humanity has become fully self-conscious. Still less did they dream that they were initiating ideas and values whose final poison-fruit would be borne in Marxism and Nazism, in which atheism stalks the world with contemptuous confidence. But that is what has happened! It is summed up in a parable.

Once upon a time (as the fairy-stories begin), a certain man, one bright morning, captured a jolly little tiger cub at the edge of a jungle. It was only a few days old. It looked, and it was, a delicious, lovely little thing. He took it home and gave it milk. He nursed and fondled the little cub, and rubbed his face against its smooth, silken skin.

He fed it regularly and played with it every day. The little cub grew. It refused to remain a tiny, innocent ball of fur. It became larger and larger. Its claws became sharper and stronger. But the man still continued to play with it until, at last, it ceased altogether to be a cub and had become a full-grown tiger. The man was warned. "You are running a great risk," said his friends; "you are playing with danger." To all of which he paid no heed. "It can't happen here!" Hadn't his cub grown up with him? So he continued to romp with the tiger and to have a lovely time, until one fine day, after a magnificent dinner, as man and tiger were enjoying a glorious romp and tumble on the grass, the tiger, in sheer fun, unsheathed his claws and killed the man. In innocent fun! And there followed a most solemn and expensive funeral. That lovely, soft, furry little kitten of the Renaissance has grown into a terrible beast of prey, and it is killing Western civilization—*but not in fun.*

We can observe the beginnings of this new attitude towards man in the departure of the Renaissance from the Catholic doctrine of man, which affirmed that man was created by God for His Own glory and that he was to live in subordination and obedience to God. Subjection was an essential element in the Catholic view of human nature. Man is in constant and complete dependence upon God and subject to His will. Quite early, Mirandola, an Italian philosopher, formulates a view of man which departs from the essential Catholic idea. In his book, *The Dignity of Man* (A.D. 1475), he represents God as speaking to Adam in the following words—"I have set thee in the midst of the world, that thou mayst the more easily behold and see all that is therein. I created thee a being neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal only, that thou mightest be free to shape and to overcome thyself. Thou

mayst sink to a beast, and be born anew to the divine likeness. The brutes bring from their mother's body what they will carry with them as long as they live; the higher spirits are from the beginning, or soon after, what they will be forever. To thee alone is given growth and a development depending on thine own free will."<sup>1</sup>

The typically modern, Liberal mind will be intolerant of any criticism of this passage, in which he will see nothing but truth sublimely expressed. He will dismiss doubt of its truth as a sign of crankiness, if not of abnormality. Burckhardt himself, who was far from being a secularized mind, regards this passage as one "which may be justly called one of the noblest of that great age".<sup>2</sup> It certainly is lofty and contains much truth, as well as beauty. But it also is the beginning of a subtle departure from the Christian doctrine of man. It is true that God created man free. But it is not true that God created man to be his own master. That is the heresy which we have seen crystallizing into the deadly doctrine of an absolute humanity, with its fatal delusion of human omnipotence. Mirandola here loosens the first link in the chain that anchors humanity to God, who created man free so that, in freedom, he might be subordinate to God; for it is only in subordination to God that man can ever hope to come to fulfilment and perfection of being. This is the Christian teaching about man. It makes God the centre of all existence and being. In the statement of Mirandola, the Renaissance begins to think of man as his own master, and this view leads, stage by stage, to the modern dogma of an absolute humanity. "The great historical significance of the rise of humanism lay in the fact that its leaders broke away from the spiritual bondage and the dead formalistic rubbish of Scholasticism. They made

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, pp. 215-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

man and his social environment the centre of their speculation, instead of losing themselves in the maze of sterile theological concepts, as the leaders of victorious Protestantism had done in the northern lands. Humanism . . . furnished the basis of a new concept of life."<sup>1</sup> It did indeed! A concept which ultimately produced the man of the concentration camps. Once humanity is made absolute and self-existing, then no monstrosity becomes impossible.

The first effects of this new attitude towards man showed themselves, not in religion, but in art. The new secularism first attacked the outworks before approaching and concentrating on the inner citadel. In the Renaissance painters the new development is heralded by a change of subjects. Saints, apostles, virgins, etc., figure less in painting. Secular subjects begin to replace religious ones. The gilt and azure blues of Byzantine give way to natural colours, and instead of the formal symmetry of the Byzantine, we see flowing lines. "Giotto was the true humanist, and man in action interested him more than remote Deity or saints in glory."<sup>2</sup> As the painters succeed one another from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, this process becomes more and more pronounced, so that at the end it can be said that "painting, which had taken 250 years to come to earth from the golden Byzantine heaven, left the earth again in an ideal perfection of the human form, with the kingdom, the power and the glory of the world as its attributes. . . . They not only brought art from heaven to earth, but they scaled heaven anew in the apotheosis of man."<sup>3</sup>

"But surely," the reader will ask, "is there anything wrong with painting natural colours, with free-hand drawing or with preferring pot-bellied merchants and their

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Nationalism and Culture*, by Rudolf Rocker, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Mr. Horace Shipp's *Italian Masters*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Vide *ibid.*, pp. 76, 77 and 79.

wives to anæmic saints as subjects?" Not at all—if *it stopped there!* But it didn't, and it never does. Whilst the painters are overtly making drawing more free, the politicians are covertly making society less free. At the same time as the artists are emancipating art, the statesmen are enslaving men. Machiavelli is telling princes and statesmen that they must abandon the dangerous delusion that morality counts at all in the relations between States. Power alone matters. He laid down the theoretical foundations of modern power-politics. He pioneered the denial of the Natural Law and of justice as absolute. "Political and military measures are almost the sole objects of his interest, and he (Machiavelli) divorces these almost wholly from religious, moral and social considerations, except as the latter affect political expedients."<sup>1</sup> This was not the doctrine of medieval Europe. The Church reminded kings, emperors and popes of the existence of an absolute law of justice—the Natural Law, which ordained that power must be conditioned by justice. It is true, of course, that that law was flagrantly ignored and violated. But violation of law does not lessen or destroy its value. Violation of law becomes a source of guilt, and the guilt of a ruler or ruling class is a safeguard for the subject, as Europe has been realizing from its experience of the absence of absolute law, to its bitter cost. But from Machiavelli onwards the subordination of morality to power has been an ever-deepening tendency. It is articulated more and more clearly in political theory and becomes more constant and shameless in practice, until, at last, Europe, which so painfully overcame the Barbarians, has been inundated by a new Barbarism, compared to which the ancient variety was an angel of light.

Thus the apparently harmless and innocuous changes

<sup>1</sup> Vide Professor Sabine's *A History of Political Theory*, p. 339.

in painting take on a deeper significance. They were symbolical of a new process of corruption eating away at the vitals of society. Art is a profoundly significant field of culture for the theologian, since in it appear the first symptoms of fundamental changes in social life. Cubism was the forerunner of the mechanization of personality, which is now visible in politics. Hence the changes in Renaissance painters were the first hints of the secularization of mankind. They were the first clear trickle of the flood which was to submerge civilization in blood and filth. Abrasions on the skin are important as signs of the subcutaneous cancer.

Here, then, is the radical sin of Western civilization. It is the great sin, the titanic, Promethean sin. It is the sin of believing and behaving as though man were an end in himself; as though humanity existed in its own right and for the sole purpose of its own glory and power. Here is the spring from which have risen the horrors that have descended upon our hapless civilization. The precious rights and sanctities which are always imperilled in a world of sinful men and women are perishing in the hands of an omnipotent humanity. "They that forget God shall go down into destruction," says a Biblical text. The twentieth century offers a bloodstained commentary on it. From this evil root—the deification of man—have issued three terrible consequences: (1) the effectual abolition of other-worldliness, the imprisonment of man in mere time and space; (2) the dissolution of spirit and the domination of matter; (3) the degradation of man, the transformation of the individual into mass man. These three evils, which are the necessary consequences of making Man the centre of life and thought, in their combined and total effect, are threatening mankind with an unprecedented peril, which is nothing less than the de-humanizing of humanity.

### CHAPTER III

## CAN WESTERN CIVILIZATION SURVIVE? (SURVIVAL—BEFORE DEATH)

BEFORE dealing with the fact of the loss of belief in the existence of a world beyond death, which is a direct consequence of the sin of Western civilization, I invite the reader to examine some of the problems which are, not merely occupying the attention of the contemporary mind, but obsessing it, imprisoning it. An obsession is something from which one cannot escape. Inescapability is the character of the outstanding social problems of post-war Europe. Some of these problems are unique in the history of mankind. This, too, is an inevitable consequence—of the abolition of other-worldliness. The analysis and discussion of these problems will, so one hopes, at least, prepare the reader to appreciate the fact of the effectual loss of belief in survival beyond death. Having observed what these problems are, I shall then try to estimate the significance of the fact that precisely such are the problems of our time and to discover its import for civilization.

What, then, are the dominating problems in Western civilization to-day?

(1) First and foremost is the problem of how to organize and maintain *world* peace, which is a new problem. For the first time in the history of civilized societies, nations are concerned with the problem of how to keep the world at peace, which has become the necessary condition for national peace. The incontrovertible proof of this is the abandonment of the dream of national isolation by the youngest, most conservative and most powerful nation in

the world, the United States. For good and ill, the American people now realize that the only way to preserve the peace for America is to preserve it for every other nation as well. This is a new problem. How to maintain the peace of the single nation, or of a geographical region, is, of course, an old problem—as old as civilization itself. From time immemorial civilized societies have asked themselves whether it was not possible to banish war, with its cruelties and suffering. This, for instance, is the majestic theme of Euripedes' *Trojan Women*. Greek tragedy, at its deepest level, was acutely aware of the evil of war, which it regarded as an aspect of a deep, fundamental evil and contradiction in human nature itself. It is an error to assume, as the humanist is apt to do, that the idea of the Fall of Man is the peculiarity of the primitive Hebrew mind. The alleged sunny, optimistic Greek mind also entertained the same idea. "The Orphics, like the Hebrews, told a myth about the Fall."<sup>1</sup> War was the manifestation of a deep-seated evil in man.

The abolition of war has been the dream, not only of the Greeks, but also of the whole human race in all ages. This dream is typified in the familiar Old Testament prophecies. ". . . and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." European political thought has been especially occupied with the hope of banishing war. In the year A.D. 800, Charlemagne devised a scheme of universal peace. In 1523 Erasmus, the great humanist, drew up a plan for European Federation. So did William Penn in 1679. Among his successors in the pursuit of the object of abolishing war were Kant and the Abbé Sieyès. But every dream of final, permanent peace has been followed by a

<sup>1</sup> Vide Dr. John Baillic's *And the Life Everlasting*, pp. 66 and 109.



nightmare of actual war. The most ambitious of all the plans for ending war, the League of Nations, was followed by the worst war of all. The finer the dream, the worse the war—this, so far, has been the sequence in actual history. The great slogan after 1918 was "Never again". There were more anti-war societies and movements between 1920 and 1939 than ever before. There was a far greater education and propaganda for peace in all countries in the last twenty years than in the preceding hundred years. Peace has been the permanent occupation of the human mind.

But we have to note one profound difference between contemporary thinking about this problem as compared with all previous thought concerning it. Old Testament prophecy, Greek tragedy, Roman Stoicism, medieval Utopianism, modern Liberal romanticism and contemporary Communist secularism—all these schools of political philosophy desired the abolition of war merely because of the cruelties, sufferings and evil which were brought in its train. Mankind has always been acutely aware of the vast evil of war. There was nothing more pointless or futile than pacifist propaganda aiming merely to convince men of the *evil* of war. It was like adding a few extra decorations to hell. Contemporary thinking about war shares to the full in the ancient conviction of the evil of war and desires its abolition because of its evil and suffering. It is, however, marked by a new element, which lends to it an obsession, an urgency and a desperation men have never felt previously. And it is this : that failure to abolish war now threatens the physical destruction of mankind. So there is, after all, something new under the sun. The new theme is that the world must banish war if the survival of civilization of any sort is to be assured. There is a vast significance in this new argument, which I stress. From the elevated grandeur of moral idealism, we have now descended to the necessity

of thinking in terms of physical survival, to the appalling, incredible necessity of guaranteeing the mere existence of humanity in this world. Let the reader note—in *this world!* War has finally become incompatible with the bare existence of civilization. The great argument now is not that war is inconsistent with Christianity, or Liberal Humanism, or Socialism, or indeed any idealism of any kind whatsoever. Idealism has vanished along with the luxury production of the pre-war era. What we are concerned with now is something much more elementary and brutal—how to survive at all as a civilized community. We are like a man who, having been dreaming of acquiring super-refinements and the rarest luxuries, is suddenly confronted by the cruel necessity of assuring to himself the barest means of mere survival. From caviare and champagne to dry bread and water. What a comment on all the magnificent progress of deified humanity; that it should endanger mere physical existence! Survival of the soul in a world beyond death may be no problem to contemporary man. But the survival of the body in this world before death has become the very devil's own problem.

This is precisely the point at which civilized man has arrived in concrete fact, as well as in theological analysis. Can humanity risk a third world war? This is the basic theme underlying all the variations of the political symphony. This is the fundamental problem to which all the plans, proposals, programmes and policies presented to the public in such perspiring profusion are addressed. Theme and Variations by *Homo Deus!* Here are a few examples: Four-Power Block (America, the British Commonwealth and Empire, China and Soviet Russia); European Federation, or, if that is too ambitious, Regional Federations like the Danubian or the Scandinavian; perpetual alliance of the United Nations, resting on the solid(?) co-operation of the

Big Three; the expansion of the San Francisco Charter into a new comprehensive World League; World-Union of Socialist Republics. Here are a few examples at random of the proposals being put forward for the ending of war, with the object of preventing the ending of humanity, of civilization. Movements for the propagating of this, that or the other mechanism as the means of achieving a warless world are sprouting into existence like mushrooms after rain. Here surely is incontrovertible evidence that the problem has become an obsession.

Modern war enormously intensifies the progress of technical development, which illustrates the truly sinister tendency, so characteristic of modern civilization, of the development of technology to outrun all relation to moral and spiritual development. This is, of course, uniquely a modern problem of which ancient and medieval civilizations had no experience. They missed the exquisite advantages, which we acquire through cinema and radio, of Beethoven—and Bing Crosby. With these, however, they also forewent the headache caused by the gulf between moral and scientific development—a literally splitting headache, which the split atom splits more than ever. There was something approaching equilibrium in the relation between social institutions and inner psychology in ancient and medieval societies. This equilibrium has become for us, however, a vicious dis-equilibrium, which war, more than any other agency, helps to produce. Modern war is a technical hot-house and a moral refrigerator at one and the same time. It stimulates external, technical progress, but arrests moral and spiritual progress. It thus increases the strain to which civilization is subject, by intensifying the characteristic tendency to dis-equilibrium. World-war One gave to the world the mixed blessing of radio. World-war Two has given it the still more mixed

blessing of radar. I postpone my comments on the atomic bomb, which I cannot but regard as a curse, so remote is society from the conditions in which it could alone be a blessing. This feature of modern war—namely, its tendency to accelerate technical development—enormously complicates the problem of physical survival.

In 1939, our chief heavy bomber was the Wellington, with its three- to four-ton load of explosive. To-day, the Wellington is, by comparison, an ancient crate. We finished the war with the Halifax, which, in its turn, was well on the way to becoming also an ancient crate. The six- and even eight-engined bomber is well beyond the blueprint stage of the "back-room boys". The Battle of Britain was won mainly by the Hurricane, which has now disappeared from front-line operations. Jet-propulsion has reduced to obsolescence the aircraft of the Second World-war. Pilotless aircraft will probably become the dominant aerial weapon in the near future, which indicates the tremendous extension of the potentialities of wireless. Ancient wars rarely produced new weapons. But that is the history of modern world-war. In 1918 we saw the birth of the tank, by the developed version of which Germany twenty years later was to enslave Europe for five years. The closing stages of the last war saw the appearance of the flying-bomb, the rocket, the acoustic torpedo. And last of all, from the depths of Pandora's Box, man has fished out the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb is its own argument. It doesn't need any words to show how precarious is the edge on which the security of civilization now rests.

The atomic bomb does, in fact, invest history with a new element or quality. It is indeed the grimmest example of the transformation of quantity into quality.<sup>1</sup> It endows

<sup>1</sup> Increase of quantity makes for a new quality, e.g., beyond a certain

diplomacy and politics with fatality. It exhausts man's historic capital. Pre-atomic war meant no more than social upheaval and suffering, which, God knows, was a great deal. But post-atomic war will mean literally the extinction of civilization. That threat has been for so long a theme for passionate oratory and gruesome literature which, in the event, did not materialize, that scepticism has perhaps immunized the world against belief in its deadly reality. Our generation, in spite of its experiences of blitz, doodle-bug and rocket, is loth to admit the significance of the atomic bomb. It is like the community in Æsop's fable, which got taken in so often by the naughty boy's cry of "Wolf! wolf!" that it refused to heed the warning when at last it proved to be real and true. Up to the last it allowed itself to be taken in, but with far more serious consequences. As a result of the release of atomic energy the threat of the physical destruction of civilization has ceased to be a merely oratorical or literary device for dramatizing a situation, for painting a peril in garish colours. What has hitherto been nothing more than a dramatic metaphor has now become a cold, concrete, technical possibility. The dispassionate brain of the scientist has at last overtaken the livid imagination of journalist and orator. The reality of Nagasaki and Hiroshima proved to be far worse than Mr. Wells's *War in the Air*. The atomic bomb leaves no room for scepticism. For the first time in man's tragic history wholesale human destruction is a deadly, fatal possibility.

The atomic bomb secretes a grim dialectic. Disintegration of the atom, which made the manufacture of the bomb possible, demands social integration. Lenin used to talk about the law of unequal development of capitalism, which

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degree of heat (217° Fah.) water turns into steam. The same law can be observed in social development in the great increase of populations—in the transformation of the city-state into the nation-state, which is qualitatively different.

meant little more than disparities in the degree of industrialization in the great industrial nations. Much more serious and substantial is the fact of the unequal development of morality—this is a much more urgent matter for civilization. The disintegration of matter, unless it be balanced by a corresponding integration of spirit, cannot but be fatal for humanity. But what resources for an accelerated integration of spirit can be commanded by a world which believes that spirit also shares in the mortality of matter ?

Thus the problem of the survival of civilization comes finally to rest on the razor-edge of power-politics, which is notoriously the politics of a disintegrated humanity. National power-politics is peculiarly the product of modern civilization. It is the politics of nations endeavouring to be sufficient unto themselves. That is why international politics in the modern age is so largely economic in complexion. Control of economic resources is sought in order to lessen the degree to which nations should be interdependent. National socialism, or “socialism in one country”, is the final logic of capitalist or imperial monopoly. This is the psychology of isolationism in a new form. It is the extreme of dis-equilibrium between technics and spirit, between science and morality. Power-politics in the age of atomic energy is lunacy to the *N*th degree.

We arrive, therefore, at the ironic paradox that the achievement of atomic physical power calls for the abolition of atomic political power—*i.e.*, the politics of nations in isolation and opposition. There is no room in this world for both atomic power and power-politics. That is the simple, brutal, fundamental fact of this era on which the world entered on August 8th, 1945, when the first atomic bomb was dropped. The attempt to control post-atomic civilization by the mechanisms of pre-atomic civilization

would be as stupid and as futile as trying to scoop up the Niagara Falls with a pint-pot. The energy locked up in a pound of matter, *if it is released*, "is almost as much as the present horse-power per annum available for the world's coal or petroleum extraction. It is therefore evident that if only a small fraction of the potential sources of energy which are available in the atom can be released, the world's present energy supplies will fade into insignificance." <sup>1</sup>

I am not, for the moment, concerned to canvass the prospects for the abandonment of power-politics, except to say that I pin very little hope on the capacity of man, especially statesmen, to learn from history *in such a way as to change his conduct*. When it is argued that *now*, when the alternative to peace is so clearly seen to be the end of civilization, nations *must* unite in preserving peace at all costs, the profound question of Jeremiah rises unbidden to my lips. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." <sup>2</sup> Which, at least, gives us some faint indication of the colossal magnitude of the problem.

It is said that a healthy physical organism always reacts instantly with all its vitality to an invading host to eject or destroy it. Sluggish reaction is regarded as a warning symptom. The comparative tepidity of the reaction of the world to the peril of the atomic bomb—what does that mean? Is it a sign of approaching death, or some profound inner decay, of a deep corrosion in the vitals? Has his loss of belief in the reality of another world deprived man of some spiritual instinct of awareness? I cannot tell. I can but confess to an oppressive realization that, with the coming of the atomic bomb, history is posing the decisive problem of man's survival on this planet. Another war, if it occurs,

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 26 of *Pilot Papers Number One*, edited by Charles Madge.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xiii. 23.

will be the last. It is highly improbable that even Macaulay's New Zealander will survive to tell the tale not of ruins, but of vaporization !<sup>1</sup>

(2) The second of the three great problems dominating Western civilization is the problem of social security, which, will the reader please note, is also a problem of survival. First is the problem of ensuring the physical existence of civilization. Then comes the problem of ensuring economic existence within that civilization. It will be instructive to note the character of this demand for social security. Its immediate background, of course, is the bitter inter-war experience of unemployment, with its low and utterly inadequate living standards—cheap, insufficient food; lack of good clothes; chronic absence of anything beyond bare necessity; a wearing oppression of unsatisfied needs. In short, an obsession with purely physical necessities, which, however, was not the only element. Unemployment saps the morale of the average citizen more than any other factor. Only those who have experienced it can realize its terrible disintegrative effects. Men who cannot obtain work develop the conviction that they are not wanted, from which it is but a step to a consciousness of permanent inferiority. Then the individual begins to lose his sense of validity. The widespread inter-war experience of prolonged unemployment has crystallized into a dominating, irrational fear, which gives a terrific emotional force to the demand that, at all costs, social security must be guaranteed. This is not a random gen-

<sup>1</sup> I beg the reader's indulgence to record here a fantastic speculation. It is, I believe, a favourite occultist theory that the 6,000 years of history, of which we have knowledge, was preceded by a long era of a highly developed civilization, of which every trace has vanished. Is it possible that that prehistoric civilization was ended by an atomic explosion, which dissolved it into vapour ? That would satisfactorily account for the complete lack of evidence. If atomic explosion can vaporize steel, it stands to reason that documents too would melt away. The reader has my permission to treat this speculation as a bit of light relief. But you never can tell !



eralization, but a concrete fact capable of scientific confirmation. It is, for instance, the most constantly recurring theme in the investigations of Mass-Observation, which is the nearest approach we have to the measurement of public opinion.<sup>1</sup> This, I am convinced, is the explanation of the popularity of the Beveridge proposals and of similar schemes. Probably not one in ten thousand read and study the voluminous Reports in which such schemes are embodied. The approval of the masses is not the result of any reasoned investigation. It is largely an instinctive assertion of desperate fear of having to face once again the lack of elementary necessities—a fear which is wholly intelligible and deserving of every sympathy. But this does not minimize the significance of the fact. It is another survival problem.

Does it not seem, to any unprejudiced mind, a ridiculous contradiction that masses of people should be reduced to an obsession with existence in an era of such great technical capacity as ours? Would it not be natural to assume, in view of the colossal increase in the productive power of modern civilization, that the masses of our industrial populations would not be content with the assurance of mere sufficiency, but would insist on luxuries, superfluities, as well as elementary necessities? There is no need whatever now to demonstrate the fantastic increase in modern productive power. Our experience in the war put the question finally beyond argument. The technical and material resources which turned out the complicated weapons of mechanical war in such astronomical quantities can, when applied to peace production, turn out equally astronomical quantities of consumer goods. That is a fact. As far as technical possibility is concerned, men and women

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Journey Home* (Murray & Co., 1944) and *Britain And Her Birth-rate* (Murray & Co., 1945).

could be thinking in terms of abundance. What they are actually thinking of is—survival. This is largely due, as we have seen, to their fear of unemployment and of the poverty consequent upon it. But this is by no means a complete explanation of the contradiction. Hidden in this term “social security” is not only a social and economic condition, but also a particular view or ideal of life, and it is this particular view of life which makes this whole problem so dangerous and intractable.

The widespread obsession with “social security” is largely a consequence of a false view of life. This statement, I realize full well, will seem downright blasphemy to the Socialist, leftarian type of mind, but that is a consideration irrelevant to its truth or untruth. Can it be seriously denied that, to the mass mind of to-day, the good life has become inseparable from the maximum possible consumption of things ! Poverty, therefore, has been promoted to be the chief evil in human existence. Before we pass judgement, however, on this evaluation of poverty, we must have some more or less exact idea of what poverty is. But one of the consequences of the gospel of progress and material abundance is the abolition of any relevant criterion of what constitutes poverty. Does it mean utter destitution ? If this is what poverty means, then no sane, decent person could deny that it is a very great evil, whether the greatest or not. But is this what is meant by poverty ? If it is, then, for practical purposes, there is very little poverty in England to-day. In this case, the professional agitator and revolutionist, together with the hot-blooded, woolly Christian Left, would be deprived of their most fruitful occasions of denunciations, which would never do. We must therefore look for a more extended definition of poverty, which, to the most thorough search, proves to be most elusive. Poverty can consist of affluence if, however,

it exists alongside still greater affluence. Thus the principle of definition shifts from the objective, concrete world into the inner, subjective world—*i.e.*, into the realm of values. Men can no longer be judged to be poor by what they consume, but by what they think they should consume, and do not. So security turns out to be impossible, since there is always inequality of consumption. Even though their bellies be bursting with chicken, the vast majority of people would still be poor if a minority of bellies were bursting with turkey. At some point or other, economic concepts become dependent on moral values, or what is regarded as moral value. Unpalatable as it may be, it is, nevertheless, a fact that envy is one of the factors in what has come to be called the "social problem", in which is comprehended the obsession with social security.

Now, it appears on the surface, where so many typically modern minds are comfortably at home, that social security is a purely economic problem. But this is an instance of the tendency to make of economics a protective escape from a spiritual problem. The problem of social security is much more spiritual than material or technical. It is necessary to understand, first of all, that social security is not an aspiration to satisfy purely elemental, physical needs. This is a radical and fatal misconception. It is altogether wrong to think of it as the equivalent, in a complex, technical society, to the simple quest for food in primitive society. Primitive man, in his search for food, was governed by a direct, simple, uncomplicated physical necessity. In the modern man's obsession with expanding consumption, however, physical necessity has got entangled with social and moral values. Modern man is not only seeking satisfaction of elementary physical needs. He is seeking also the satisfaction of social and moral values which he has formulated and affirmed, not in simple physical needs, but

in dynamic, ever-increasing, physical *wants*. These multiplying physical wants have become the vehicle of modern man's values, his ideas of what constitutes the justification of existence and being. To the primitive man, the hunt for food embodied the will to live, to survive. To the modern man, the pursuit of material wealth, or illth as Ruskin would say, embodies the will to self-affirmation, to excess, to glory, as well as the will to survive. This vast distinction between primitive man and his modern descendant transforms the contemporary obsession with things from a physical necessity into a moral affirmation. It is this transformation which bedevils our entire economic activity. It invests our economic activities with a unique historic character and renders comparison with organized economic activities of previous epochs inadmissible.

It has been necessary to make this distinction clear so that we may be able to appreciate what our problem actually is. The problem of our highly technical civilization, with its greatly increased power over Nature, is not how to guarantee the satisfaction of simple needs, but how to guarantee the satisfaction of wants which persist in increasing in number, intensity and complexity. This is the ultimate reality behind that seemingly innocent and laudable phrase "social security". Material needs have been endowed, as they have never been before, with a *false infinity*, by the values which our society considers to be the supreme values.

Thus, in cold reality, the problem which our civilization has set itself is insoluble. Let me put it in this way: How can you satisfy unlimited needs with limited material resources? The material resources of to-day may satisfy the wants of *yesterday*, but not the wants of to-day or tomorrow, because these will have increased. By making the good life dependent on material consumption, modern man has made his material needs *artificially infinite*. Ex-

panding material resources, therefore, can never expand sufficiently to satisfy them. A rough analogy can be drawn from greyhound racing. However fast the greyhound runs, he will never catch the electric hare, the speed of which is regulated by that of the greyhound. The faster the greyhound runs, faster still moves the hare. Modern man is as blissfully unconscious, in this matter, as the greyhound.

Confirmation of the above analysis comes from a writer who cannot be accused of being either a Christian or a reactionary. Let me present it in Mr. Lewis Mumford's own words, who is the author referred to. "The philosophers of industrialism, from Bacon to Bentham, from Smith to Marx, insisted that the improvement of man's condition was the highest requirement of morality. But in what did that improvement consist? The answer seemed so obvious to them that they did not bother to justify it: the expansion and fulfilment of the material wants of man, and the spread of these benefits, from the few who had once preempted them, to the many who had so long lived on the scraps Dives had thrown into the gutter. The great dogma of this religion is the dogma of increasing wants. To multiply the powers of production one must likewise multiply the capacities of consumption. What, then, was man's true life? The utilitarian had a ready answer: it consisted in having more wants than could be supplied by the machine, and inventing more ways in which these wants could be varied and expanded. Whereas the traditional religions had sought to curb appetite, this new religion had openly stimulated it; forgetting its hungry Oliver's, who could with pathetic justice ask for more, it licensed its Bounderbys to unlimited consumption and surfeit. In the name of economy a thousand wasteful devices would be invented; and in the name of efficiency new forms of

mechanical time-wasting would be devised : both processes gained speed through the nineteenth century and have come close to the limit of extravagant futility in our own time. But labour-saving devices could only achieve their end—that of freeing mankind for higher functions—if the standard of living remained stable. The dogma of increasing wants nullified every real economy and set the community in a collective squirrel-cage . . . The mechanical expansion of human appetites, the appetite for goods, the appetite for power, the appetite for sensation, has no relation whatever to the ordering of the means of existence for the satisfaction of human needs. The latter process requires a humane scale of values, and a priority schedule for their fulfilment, which puts first things first.”<sup>1</sup>

Concealed, then, in this term “social security” is a fatal confusion of values as well as a problem that defies solution. In conscious form, the masses, who have hitherto been deprived of the goods which our capitalist civilization has produced so abundantly, but distributed so unequally, think of security in terms of a vague, modest competence—food, shelter, clothes, some luxuries. But, in actual experience, their consumption will never achieve their idea of security, for the simple reason that expanding appetite is endowed with an independent moral value. The failure to satisfy expanding appetite will be reflected into an inner sense of psychic and spiritual insecurity, which no abundance of material consumption whatever will ever be able to allay.

(3) Another of the problems now becoming an obsession is the problem of population, which is also a problem of survival. The substance of this question was presented in the interim statement of the Royal Commission which has been appointed to investigate and recommend. Let me quote it :

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Condition of Man*, pp. 304-5 (Secker & Warburg, 1944).

"The main fact is the fall in the average size of family, which began in the 1870's. Until then, married women, on the average, had more than five children before the end of their childbearing period. Many had ten or more. By the 1930's, at the rates at which married women were then having children, the number was down to about two. An average family of five children made ample allowance for the people who did not marry and for the children who died, and still left a new generation half as big again as the one before; the population therefore grew rapidly. An average family of two children makes no allowance for children who die young and for those who do not marry. If people go on having families no larger than this, each generation will be succeeded by a generation smaller in numbers. The population therefore, unless it is maintained by immigration, must in the long run inevitably fall. To allow for deaths in childhood, for people who do not marry and for married couples who cannot have children, married couples who can have children should have an average of well above two if the population is to be maintained."

Out of the complicated and confusing details of this vast problem of population, two plain, simple facts emerge, the significance of which is grim: (1) if the present trends of population continue, then the majority of the population of Great Britain by 1970 will be over sixty. No purpose whatever is served by obscuring the fatal social and political implications of this possibility. We shall become a nation of old men and women, and this will mean a profound change in the character of our island race. Britain will become a nation in whose vitals the fires will be burning low. A nation of declining vitalities and decaying energies will no longer be characterized by adventurousness and the forward-looking attitude. It will be a nation of the twilight, whose generations will be numbered. How long

can such a nation survive? How long can the most elementary condition of its national being—namely, physical existence—be guaranteed?

Fresh urgency and relevance are added to these questions by the second broad fact of the current population problem: (2) in another twenty-five to thirty years, the number of babies being born will be less than the number of people dying each year, if the present population trend continues. If this situation materializes, our extinction as an island people will be only a matter of time. It will have become a question of simple arithmetic. British history will be finally reduced to statistics. A nation whose deaths exceed its births is itself dying. However we gild and decorate and elaborate, the fatal significance of the fact stands clear. Our very physical survival is at stake.

It is interesting, to say the least, to note how a purely social investigation runs into theological and spiritual considerations, and so confirms the analysis of our problems attempted in these pages. "Current negativism" (so runs the conclusion of a Mass Observation Report on Demobilization<sup>1</sup>) "for the future, the virtual collapse of the idea of inevitable progress, is not going to be easily remedied.<sup>2</sup> Faith will not be restored by abstract justice and social patching. People are not going to have more babies because an equitable system of demobilization is devised, any more than they are going to have more babies solely because a more generous scale of family allowances is made; the reason for not having babies lies deeper and stretches further ahead than that, far beneath and beyond the jobs, money, security, which such plans can provide." If this

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Journey Home*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Let the reader observe once more how unconsciously modern secular thought begs the fundamental questions. As in the above citation, it seems to be taken for granted that the restoration of faith in the dogma of inevitable progress is at least desirable. But is it?



conclusion does nothing else, it does at any rate indicate a fundamental doubt, which expresses itself in a spirit of scepticism about the tendencies and values of modern civilization; a spirit which hesitates to entertain any exaggerated hopes and dreams, and seems to be content, on the material side, with the certainty of just physical survival. If even this much can be achieved, there is a feeling that it would be wonderful. It is a revealing comment on the character of modern civilization when man's hopes are scaled down to the desperate task of just hanging on by the skin of his teeth.

Here, then, we are facing what can only be adequately described as a grim and stubborn contradiction right in the vitals of modern civilization: that in an epoch of unparalleled technical power and performance, the spiritual hopes of civilized mankind should shrink to the level of physical survival. Attempts are being made to obscure or to rationalize this grim fact. That, in my sincere judgement, is the real meaning of the arguments being put forth by eminent sociologists for what is called the stabilization of population. We have lived through an age of progress (so they argue). Now we must achieve equilibrium. This protects the mind from the fierce glare of the naked truth—a sop to the desperately-stricken pride of Western, secularized man. It is the new sociological form now being assumed by the basic humanist, secular illusion of man's omnipotence. We can mark the progress, for instance, in the work of Mr. Lewis Mumford, the distinguished American sociologist.

Mr. Mumford sees, with a piercing clarity of vision, the illusions that have inspired modern capitalist man. He sees no less clearly the illusions that animate his successor, modern socialist man. No contemporary sociologist can compare with Mr. Mumford either for insight into the social process or for his devastating exposure of its essen-

tial futility. "But there is far more impressive evidence," he writes,<sup>1</sup> "of the vanity of all these great expectations (current capitalist and socialist visions of the future) than I have yet shown. The fact is that most of the current plans for remolding our civilization ignore the vast secular change that has crept upon Western Civilization during the past century, almost unawares. That change is nothing less than the end of the Era of Expansion, and the collapse of the major premises, metaphysical, moral, social, economic, on which it was based." But in his very next sentence Mr. Mumford proceeds to construct a new major premise, which out-deludes the most gradiose delusions of capitalist and socialist combined.

"The world crisis," continues Mr. Mumford, "that has existed for the lifetime of a whole generation indicates that a radical shift in the direction of social movement has taken place: this shift began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and now, directly and indirectly, has affected almost every institution. The crisis has two aspects: an external and an internal one. Here I shall deal mainly with the causes of the external crisis. The external change may be summed up in a brief sentence: an age of expansion is giving place to an age of equilibrium. The achievement of this equilibrium is the task of the next few centuries." Mr. Mumford then proceeds to condense John Stuart Mill's arguments<sup>2</sup> for a "stationary state", by which he contends that the social benefits of technological progress can alone be made available for society in general "namely, that a state of dynamic equilibrium, though it might be dreaded by the profiteer, was precisely the condition required for translating mechanical improvements into social welfare."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Condition of Man*, p. 398. In the torrent of printed matter to-day, this book is truly outstanding.

<sup>2</sup> In the second chapter of his *Principles of Political Economy*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Condition of Man*, p. 400.

The hope of Equilibrium (with a capital) is a super-gigantic illusion. It is implied in Mr. Mumford's own statement, the significance of which he seems to have missed completely. This lovely mirage of "dynamic equilibrium", Mr. Mumford admits, may "be dreaded by the profiteer". Exactly! It will be dreaded by the profiteer. Mr. Mumford can cheerfully stake his last American dollar on that certainty. The profiteer's resentment will operate as a source of *dis-equilibrating* energy, which can only be suppressed by the organized force of the State. And this will only, can only end in the complete slave, servile society. The Age of Equilibrium will be the Age of Planned Slavery, so great must become the power of the State to suppress the most fundamental, persistent and powerful instinct and quality of human nature, the instinct of self-centred affirmation, of egoistic appropriation. In that process, the Omnipotent State will exhaust itself and devitalize human nature, and thus dissipate the energy and corrode the creative capacity on which the entire technological bag of tricks depends. Civilized man will revert to primitivism. The essential distinction of civilized man is precisely his dynamic energy and his self-assertion against all obstacles. Primitive man is characterized by his stagnant acceptance of tradition and the status quo—i.e., by *social equilibrium*. Mr. Mumford is assuming an impossibility: that civilized, egoistic man can transcend his egoism by the power of reason; for nothing less than this is implied in Mr. Mumford's vision of an Age of Equilibrium.

What he does not seem to realize is that the profiteer's dread is nothing but the expression of the radical, inherent universal will to self-centred affirmation, which always operates as a disturbing factor in any and every social structure. It is the source of all historic change. It takes the form of profit-making in a capitalist society, which is

accidental. The form varies, but not the substance. In totalitarian society it assumes the form of bureaucratic power. Balance of power is never more than approximate, a fact to which modern European history bears eloquent testimony. Without balance, equilibrium, whether political or social, is impossible. It never maintains more than a precarious, uneasy tenure, and is always tending to break down.

The ideal of an Age of Equilibrium demands the one thing which the entire history of civilized society most conspicuously shows to be unattainable by natural, self-centred human nature—namely, *the recognition and acceptance of limits*. Hubris is the native, characteristic sin of fallen man, the refusal to acknowledge finiteness, limitation, creatureliness. Self-centred human nature is tormented by the lust to become God. This will to infinite expansion infects every human activity, and so makes every society unstable. This is what makes politics what it is, an uneasy adjustment of conflicting claims, which is never perfect, never universally acceptable, but always the dynamic seed-ground of its own reversal. Of all the illusions that have dominated civilized man's behaviour, his new, contemporary illusion of Equilibrium, which is now emerging into historic shape, is the most grandiose of all, and compact with the possibility also of the greatest human disaster.

This dream of a dynamically stable society testifies to a condition of depressed vitalities in civilized society. This is what makes Communism, which is the vehicle of the vitalities of peoples hardly half-civilized, so significant and sinister. Communism succeeds only among people who have never experienced the standards and achievements of Western civilization, whose energies have not yet been worn by the failure of successive historic experiments in the organization of society. Communism has not the ghost of

a chance among communities that have lived under the standards and institutions of Western civilization, and whose vitalities and energies are not yet so exhausted as to dissolve their will-to-resist. But we may be approaching that point in Western Europe when Communism, or red Fascism, as I prefer to call it, may succeed in imposing itself. It is thus a paradoxical combination of opposites. It is accepted at one end as the expression of a dynamic still unspent. It is finally endured, submitted to, at the other end because of a dynamic in its last spluttering embers. Perhaps the dream of an Age of Equilibrium is the final spurt of the wearied civilized Titan against the vital upsurge of a fresh barbarian competitor, like the desperate rally of an older, more skilled boxer against the physical exuberance of a younger and cruder opponent. There is much in the contemporary scene that lends colour to this possibility, and not least the attitude of the common man, who shows signs of thinking himself lucky, if he can be certain of elementary existence, uncomplicated by threat of war and periodic industrial crises. When, in theory, technical resources make possible an existence of Eldorado, spiritual hope beats a feeble wing. Instead of cleaving the sky, it flies at ground-level. Our exhausted era has no stomach for empyrean superlatives. It has become pedestrian, and even hobbling. When at last flight is possible, its best hope is that it may be able to walk *without too much fainting*.

Thus in an age of unparalleled material achievement, we find ourselves in the grip of an obsession with survival, physical, bodily existence, not after death, but before death. We are troubled by the menace of extinction, not in some future, ghostly spirit-world, but here in this present, concrete, material world. We have bartered away a super-temporal, external order of existence for a world of here and now, of sights and sounds, of solid, sensuous pleasure and

fulfilment, only to discover that its foundations are cracking beneath our feet. If we believed in the existence of a devil (which we don't, in spite of the urgent encouragement of the twentieth century), one would feel tempted to say that modern, post-Renaissance man has been sold a pup. In exchange for an invisible, eternal world, we have been fobbed off with an all-too-visible world, which, however, seems to be dissolving before our eyes, a visible world in process of becoming invisible ! It's a familiar devil's-trick. Faust could tell us a lot about it.

The dominating problems of our post-war world are each one problems of survival; problems not of abundance, excess and glory, but of desperately maintained and guarded existence. How can mankind ward off the peril of extinction as a civilized community which another war threatens ? How can society be ensured of the means of economic survival within our threatened order ? And, thirdly, can society guarantee its own adequate reproduction ? In other words, assuming certainty of civilized existence (a very big assumption indeed), and assurance of sufficiency of material consumption within a civilization reprieved, can we be certain that there will be forthcoming the population to enjoy it all ?

These are the dominant themes of a secular, de-Christianized society in the mid-period of the most wonderful century in human history, of a society that has staked all its cards on the self-sufficiency of man. Is there any relation between these two profoundly significant facts ?

#### CHAPTER IV

### THE ABOLITION OF OTHER-WORLDLINESS

THIS world in which, as we have seen, existence has become so precarious is strikingly distinguished from the medieval world by the fact that it is man's only sphere of existence. In the consciousness of the modern man there is no awareness of any world other than this present world of time and space. His mind is all foreground, which, it is true, projects forward, but in one dimension only, in a time-space continuum. In the consciousness of medieval man existence was two-dimensional. Super-imposed on the time-space continuum was another order of existence, a spiritual and supernatural. In other words, medieval man was daily conscious of being a denizen of two worlds. His successor, modern man, is conscious of only one world, the world of the here and now. This contraction of being into a one-world existence is the by-product of the fatal sin of modern, Western man. By deifying humanity, by giving humanity the quality of an absolute, modern man narrows existence down to this present world. We are already in the position of appreciating the irony of the modern situation—namely, that this one and only world into which all existence is packed has itself become most problematical, most precarious. Modern man is like a gambler, whose trump card turns out to be a joker. The de-motion of God in thought carries with it the abolition of other-worldliness. And the abolition of other-worldliness carries with it the abolition also of a multitude of worldly goods and gains. It is, however, precisely this connection between other-worldliness and the very solid values of this

world that most men to-day are sublimely unaware of—as primitive man's unawareness of the connection between sexual intercourse and the birth of babies.

The decay of belief in the reality of a super-natural world-order is no longer open to doubt. It has degenerated into a mere idea, abstract, frozen and wholly unrelated to modern man's interests. Belief in a world-order beyond death has exactly nothing to do with the hopes and activities and enjoyments of the secularized man of to-day. Heaven and hell have no bearing whatever on a life whose fulfilment is thought of in terms of ample material consumption or cultural self-display, when culture has become inseparable from expanding material appetite. A culture which has become maximally dependent on a consumption of things is qualitatively different from a culture minimally dependent on things. Oh, very different! Modern man is the product of a fervid obsession with material and social progress, with a gospel of more and more things. His life consists in the accumulation of wants and of the means to satisfy them. His real philosophy is the exact opposite of that enunciated by Christ. Man's life does consist in the abundance of things. That has been the ideological dynamic of the tremendous capitalist expansion of the last century in particular—more and more; step on it; speed-up; more speed, energy, money, more everything. To all this, the concept of an eternal order is just irrelevant. Men whose interests are in ceaseless consumption, with the restlessness engendered by it, feel no magnetism in the belief of enduring spiritual order. The ecstasy of Heaven cannot compete with the cruder, immediate bliss of lavish consumption, whether directly, or vicariously through the cinema. Belief in another world atrophies owing to loss of relevance and function, like the appendix in the human anatomy. In fact, such belief has declined to the point of



being a mere appendix in the spiritual anatomy of man. The appendicitis to which a functionless physical appendix gives rise has its parallel also in the spiritual constitution. As Mr. Arthur Koestler has put it: "The age of enlightenment has destroyed faith in personal survival; the scars of this operation have never healed. There is a vacancy in every living soul, a deep thirst in all of us."<sup>1</sup>

The decay in belief is the consequence of the growing irrelevance of another world, not vice versa. If the people were canvassed about the matter, I have little doubt that the majority would admit to some kind of vague belief in survival beyond death, just as they would admit to a belief in the idea of the equator. But the belief in the one case has as little personal significance as it has in the other. John Smith doesn't meditate on the equator over his glass of beer. It is a safer guess that he will be wondering what horse is going to win the Derby. Where your heart is, there will be, not only your treasure, but also your real belief and doctrine.

The extent of the general decline of belief in another world may be gauged from the fact of its comparative subordination in the teaching of the Church and in the thinking of Church members. Dr. Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting, made a statement at a conference in Cambridge which caused shocked surprise at the time. He said that of 6,000 talks and sermons it had been his duty to read since he had been at the B.B.C., only one had said anything vital about life after death. Dr. Welch must have a tough spiritual constitution to have survived 6,000 sermons! But I will warrant that of those 6,000, he came across a considerable number which said something vital about Christianity and social problems. Certainly more than one! That theme is one of the urgent, dynamic interests of

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Yogi and the Commissar* (Jonathan Cape), p. 226.

contemporary Christian theology, and will therefore be proclaimed frequently.

Church members are only a degree less secularized in their consciousness than the public that is completely divorced from the Church. Theoretical appreciation of belief in another world is, of course, stronger in the Church than in the world. But it is not by any means a dynamic disturbance in the life of the believer. What proportion of thought is given to it? What practical influence does it exercise upon the concrete pursuits of daily existence? To suggest one test, how many Christian parents look upon the reality of spiritual destiny as a factor in their children's career? How many judge possible careers for their children by their disciplinary value for life beyond death? The tepid attitude of Church members generally towards the whole question is eloquent testimony to the extreme secularization of modern man's consciousness. Medieval mentality, to indicate it briefly, was profoundly and decisively different.

Medieval man took the existence of another world for granted. The denial of it would have been to him both a spiritual and an intellectual shock, as much of a shock as the denial of biological evolution would be to a typical modern mind. "The conflict, inherent in medieval Christianity, was in part a struggle between temporal desires which many men approved, and their renunciation for eternal joy."<sup>1</sup> "Accordingly all medieval variances of thought show common similitudes: to wit, some consciousness of need of super-rational and superhuman salvation; some deference to authority. . . ."<sup>2</sup> The whole pattern of medieval civilization was drawn against the background of an eternal world. Angels and demons were pedestrian realities.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Medieval Mind*, by James Osborn Taylor, vol. 1, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 326.

Daily secular existence was penetrated through and through—saturated, in fact—with an awareness of another realm of being. Belief in the reality of heaven and hell was the almost invariable rule; disbelief was the rare and almost abnormal exception.

This was the belief and mentality that dominated that medieval, theocentric civilization. It was a belief in the co-existence of two worlds, two orders of being and existence—this present, visible world of matter and time; and a transcendent, invisible world of spirit. These two worlds interpenetrated. At every point of human life in this world, in every second of time, eternity was present and active. Life in this world, therefore, was incomplete. "Now we see as in a glass darkly." Its completion or fulfilment lay beyond history. Experience here in time and space was but an intimation, a hint, of some greater thing yet to come. It was like a sentence which, starting to form itself on a screen, fades away before completion in blurred letters. The completion of the sentence lay beyond the visible screen. The feeling of love for another person, for instance, was but a foretaste of some greater, inconceivable ecstasy in a higher world. Every concrete event was a pointer to something grander and nobler. Earthly existence merged into an illimitable, mystic perspective, as though one were gazing into a sky without a horizon.

'This medieval inheritance modern civilization' has squandered, until to-day there is hardly anything of it left. The abandonment of a super-natural order was inherent in the modern deification of humanity. A world in which man elbows God out of the position of centrality is necessarily a world which must become self-sufficient, supreme and exclusive. Given a humanity which is absolute, the world or arena in which it exists and operates must also participate in the absoluteness that humanity has

arrogated to itself. Since man is the supreme arbiter of his own fate, he cannot but deny and dismiss a world over which he has no control. The modern mind cannot continue to entertain a faith and a system of belief which radically deny his own self-originating assumptions. Hence, a world beyond death progressively dissolves. It becomes functionless. Whatever can be the point of continuing to believe in a world of fulfilment beyond death, if man's destiny is capable of fulfilment before death in a world of time and space? So with the establishment of the new faith in man's self-determining, secular and this-worldly destiny, belief in another world begins to undergo the process of extinction. We to-day see this process in mature development. The world beyond death has, by this mid-stage of the twentieth century, become irrelevant. Five centuries of intellectual and social development have carried Europe very far indeed from the medieval attitude of living, dynamic belief in the reality of another world to the modern quicksands and universal insecurity of belief in a visible world of time, space and matter only.

Here is a radical, dominating distinction between medieval Europe and modern Europe. Medieval man lived in a community of God, man, angels and devils. Modern man lives in an aggregate of human beings only, which, in fact, has come to mean a ghastly isolation. Modern man has, all unwittingly, securely imprisoned himself. Fascism is one of the many attempts to escape from his atomic secular isolation into a tribal consciousness of the herd. Mass-man is the extreme and terrible endeavour of a wholly secular civilization to compensate the loss of another world. The pre-Copernican world was a much larger spiritual universe than the solar system of modern thought. In the confined, provincial world of the medieval idea, medieval man was a freeman of eternity. But in the limitless world

of infinite space of modern science, man is a prisoner in a contracting world. As matter has expanded, the spirit has shrunk. Modern man has been trapped into a cold and dark isolation. Nazism was—partly, at any rate—an unconscious reaction against this horror which our age will find increasingly insupportable. We can say of it what the General Confession of the Communion office says about sin—"the burden of it is intolerable". Modern man has no hinterland, no perspective of mystery. Existence has been telescoped into a one-world dimension.

The nymphs are gone, the fairies flown;  
The ancient gods forever fled;  
The stars are silent overhead;  
The music of the spheres is still;  
The night is dark, the wind is chill;  
And man is left alone with man.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the abolition of other-worldliness is a process essentially theological, its consequences are by no means confined to theology. From a theological process have flown consequences that are economic, political, social and cultural. Our society has long since become inured to the error that theology is a decorative luxury. But history, and especially the history now in the making, is a tragic disproof. Theology is the linchpin of civilization. In the final analysis, the entire character of society is determined by it.

The fatal significance of theology for civilization is indicated by the social and psychological condition of our society to-day. A cursory survey of it even makes nonsense of the argument that, by abolishing other-worldliness, modern civilization can in any sense be said to have gained anything at all. From any point of view whatever, in the final balancing of accounts, men and women have suffered a tragic nett loss. Let us consider a few examples. There is, for instance, the contention that so long as society was

<sup>1</sup> A poem by Israel Zangwill.

obsessed with a world beyond death, they neglected the possibility of progress and advancement in this world. When society threw off the incubus and deadweight of belief in another world, things began to happen. We can most assuredly agree that things began to happen—far more, in fact, than men ever bargained for. But only cock-eyed materialists would argue that these constitute a gain. Let us test some of these things.

No aspect of Christian belief aroused so much venom or derision in the Socialist Movement on the Continent (which was almost wholly atheist) as the hope of life after death. Lenin, with his flat, billiard-table mind, poured out a stream of vitriolic scorn on "this sham and fraud" by means of which the capitalist class, through the venal agency of the priests, doped and deceived the long-suffering proletariat, and so prevented them from rebelling against their oppressors. One does not need to read a great deal of Lenin before discovering that he was a past master of the art of abuse.<sup>1</sup> In this art, Lenin surpassed even the most bitter of the controversial theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And they were not exactly amateurs. Destroy this belief in the fraudulent heaven of the priests, and they will then concentrate on the revolution and win an abundant life for themselves and their families. That was the theory. Every means was employed to destroy Christian belief, especially the belief in Heaven. The I.W.W. (Independent Workers of the World, an American Syndicalist organization) made a song of it—"You'll have pie in the sky when you die". In France and Germany, more than in other European countries, the organized

<sup>1</sup> To give an example at random, let the reader glance through his *The Deception of the People*, one of the volumes in the Little Lenin Library. Opponents are "backward", "ignorant" or "malicious" or "hypocrites". "There can be no disagreement about this." These are the mildest terms in Lenin's vocabulary of abuse.

workers aggressively and completely threw away any hope of "pie in the sky". They concentrated on the task of achieving boiled beef and carrots here on earth, washed down by illimitable quantities of wine (in France) and beer (in Germany). This was the theory. But what was the practice?

It can hardly be said to have fulfilled the hopes of an earthly paradise. On the whole, the organized working-class movement has got more guns than butter. A progressively increasing proportion of productive resources has been devoted to armaments rather than to consumer commodities, and it is highly improbable, with the present relations of the Great Powers, that the workers will see any diminution in that process in the near future. That great champion of the working-class, Stalin, certainly holds out no hope in this direction. In his May-Day manifesto,<sup>1</sup> after the usual blarney, he came down to brass-tacks. "From day to day, Russia's armed forces must raise the standards of their military skill with the development of military science and technique." This cannot be done without the expenditure of considerable productive capacity, which would otherwise be devoted to the production of the consumer commodities required to raise the living standards of the Russian masses above the coolie level. Guns will always have priority before butter.

The abolition of other-worldliness has not led, directly or indirectly, to pie on the earth. At the peak of productive power, and at the highest achievement of organized trade-union power, increasing numbers of the European proletariat were hard put to it to get sufficient bread. The estimated numbers of unemployed just before the war in the industrial countries was 57,000,000. Exactly at the stage where society had the greatest technical capacity to

<sup>1</sup> Vide *News-Chronicle*, May 1st, 1946.

assure a high standard of living for the masses (except in Soviet Russia), and when the workers were most powerfully organized to demand and obtain such a standard (again with the exception of Russia, where the workers are powerless against the State)—exactly at that point, standards of living in the aggregate began to decline. On the outbreak of war, which lasted six years, the decline accelerated rapidly and calamitously. Neither can we hope, in the existing social and political situation, for any quick or easy recovery. Already 1939 begins to wear the aspect of a golden age.

It is undeniable, therefore, that the dissolving of a hope of heaven hereafter has not succeeded in establishing heaven here and now. The same, of course, cannot be said about hell, which has been considerably anticipated by many thousands of socialists most contemptuous of "pie in the sky". They endured hell in the concentration camps both of Hitler and of Stalin. But that was one of the events which was not in the secular bargain. Against this horror and the pre-war horror of "technological" unemployment, the purely secular, this-worldly obsession of the worker offered neither protection nor remedy. How many millions of workers in war-torn Europe would be thankful for a bit more bread to-day! The greatly increased technical capacity, which is presumed to be the solid gain resulting from the abolition of other-worldliness, has not resulted in correspondingly better material conditions for the workers. "Pie in the sky" does not sound quite so comic as it did even a generation ago. But let us look at another aspect.

By concentrating more on this world, by shaking off the alleged stupefying effects of belief in another world, it was confidently anticipated that the human mind and spirit would enjoy a great release, and would be ushered into a



new and larger, freer world. For one thing, men would be emancipated from the restraining fetters of an authoritarian Church, which so gravely hampered the creative processes of mind and will. Men would breathe a more stimulating and expansive air. "Spirits are awake," cried Von Ulrich, one of the most brilliant of the humanists, "it is good to be alive." Men would drink deeply of the wine of liberty, and life would become grander, fuller and freer. That was the theory. What is the reality at long last?

Well! There are many things which can justly and truly be said about the modern world as compared with medieval Europe. Men can travel to-day from place to place, from country to country, at a far greater speed than they could in thirteenth-century Europe—if they get police permission to travel at all. We can breakfast in London on bacon and eggs, and dine in New York, three thousand miles away, all in one day. There are prospects of being able to travel at the speed of sound. There has been also an immense increase in physical comfort, which is not by any means to be despised, as I most assuredly do not. I am not wedded to the theory of the inherent and necessary virtues of discomfort, which leaves open the question whether increased physical comfort may not be purchased at too great a cost. Of the fact of greater comfort, however, there can be no doubt. We live to-day in better houses, eat better and more varied food, sleep in more luxurious beds, are better clothed, though this is arguable. In short, there is no comparison between the material conditions of the modern man and those of his medieval ancestor. If the essential values of life were ultimately and finally material, then there could be no escape from the conclusion of the superiority of the modern to medieval civilization. But this is not the whole story, which, when we know it, does seem to suggest that there is an element of caricature in the

opinion that the average man of to-day is living in a larger, freer world than his medieval fellow.

It is true that the average man in medieval Europe lived in a more severely restricted physical environment than the average man of to-day. But it is also true that he lived in a far greater spiritual world than his equivalent to-day. The average man of medieval Europe rarely moved out of his village or parish. One of the features of Feudal society was that men tended to stay put, both physically and socially—*i.e.*, the average man. There was an abundance of international travelling in medieval Europe. The Sorbonne in Paris was, almost certainly, more international and varied in class than any modern university. But the peasant and, to a less degree, the craftsman seldom moved far. The modern man lives in a much bigger physical world, but his spiritual, cultural world is woefully more confined. Mass-production has standardized life to an appalling extent in every industrialized community. There is far more variety of individuality in communities predominantly agricultural even to-day. This is certainly true of the less industrialized nations of Europe, such as Spain, for instance. There are more personalities, real individuals, to the square yard in Spain than one is apt to find in the square mile in advanced capitalist countries. The distinctive trends and institutions of our extremely secularized societies tend towards a dangerous uniformity in taste, in opinion, in expression, in attitude and in mode of life. The newspaper, the cinema and the radio are obvious examples.

The popular mass newspaper inevitably encourages shallowness as well as uniformity of mentality, since everything has to be presented in the guise of news. What is news must be true. In the course of time, from the assumption that happenings must be true if they are reported as news, a type of mentality is created which comes to think

that ideas also must be true if they are advocated in a newspaper. This statement, I know, must seem crazy to the reader. But how else can we account for the sudden changes in mass belief and attitude? Before Hitler's invasion of Russia in 1941, there was no serious confusion of Communism with Democracy. But it wasn't long before Russia was being thought of, in the mass-mind, as one of the democratic States. That was predominantly a newspaper achievement. The theme was taken up by the Press, with very few exceptions, that Russia was defending democracy, and in due course it became a popular belief. The change of attitude was not the result of thinking, but of reiterated reading. Opinions tend to be formed by sense-perception, and not by a process of ratiocination. "It was in last night's paper, so it must be true." The warning that one must not believe everything one reads in a newspaper is a reaction against prevailing readiness to believe. What the popular mass journal presents is regarded, not as material for opinion or conviction, but as opinion ready-made. Uniformity in the production of consumer commodities is matched with uniformity in the production of opinion and taste.

Cinema and radio intensify the effect of the popular Press. Millions read the same half-truth every day in their newspaper. They see the same half-truth pictorially represented every night in their local or favourite cinema. Or they hear the same thing every day and night on the radio. The tendency to uniformity is inevitable, irrespective of whether what is heard is true or false. This is probably the supreme peril of the machine. It casts the precious spirit of man into set moulds or patterns, which anyhow corrupts the exercise of personal liberty. It is puerile to imagine that society can generalize the machine (*i.e.*, apply it to every activity in life) without mechanizing personality at the same time.

And mechanization of mind and spirit necessarily results in the corruption of freedom. It is the seed-bed of the totalitarian order.

Thus our self-existing world runs to standardization. All roads lead to uniformity. We can fly to New York in a day and see exactly the same film or type of film as we see in London or Manchester or even Much-Muttering-on-the-Wold. We tend to dress alike, to think alike, to fall victims to the same obsessions and fears. Montague Burton makes us look like dukes, Hollywood makes us talk like Clark Gable, and the monopoly mass-Press makes us think like automatons. Look at some of the topics that excite the mass-mind. "Do film-stars make good husbands?" An easy one—the answer is that a film star makes a minimum of at least three husbands. The most interesting details about the great, or the notorious, are the least important, such as the colour of their pyjamas, the food they eat, the time they go to bed or get up, etc.

Now, to contend that this world, this type of mental activity, is a larger world than that in which the average medieval man lived is merely imbecile. I am not arguing for a moment that the world of medieval man was ideal, and certainly not that medieval man himself was ideal. I am only too well aware that neither was ideal. I am therefore under no temptation to advocate that modern man should retrace his steps back to medievalism, which is anyhow impossible both physically and psychologically. My contention simply is that the world that has resulted from the abandonment of the medieval faith in a divine and supernatural order is not, in comparison, a more emancipated world, a fuller, richer world, or a freer world. Are syndicated music-hall turns superior to the clowns of Feudal Europe? Is the highly-paid crooner of to-day a cultural advance on the wandering minstrel of medieval

civilization? The popular culture of our world is immeasurably shallower than that of its predecessor. It is admittedly wider and more multiform, but it is also thinner and more superficial. Unless we are hopelessly addicted to the worship of the latest fashion, then the one thing that cannot be admitted is that this world of the present, with its mass-hysterias, its boredom, its increasing neuroses, its impalpable fears and obsessions, is a freer world, a larger world than that of medieval man. Whatever sole concentration on this world has achieved, it assuredly has not brought a more significant life to the people. By consigning the supernatural world, with its angels and archangels, to the limbo of superseded myths, modern man has not thereby won an earthly Eldorado. Pope Innocent III may have been an arrogant dictator. But was Hitler an improvement? Is Stalin, the socialist emperor of the Russias? The Inquisition was most certainly oppressive. But was the Gestapo an improvement—except in technical efficiency? It is difficult, to say the least, to point to a single evil in medievalism to which an equivalent cannot be found in modern civilization, though in a different social form and generally more virulent.

But the most sinister consequence of the abolition of other-worldliness—so sinister as to be satanic—is that it involves man in an utterly insoluble contradiction. It condemns man to labour at a task which is inherently self-frustrating, like filling a tank, the leakage of which is exactly equal to the measure of its intake. To appreciate this contention, it will be necessary to give brief consideration to the nature and total constitution of man.

Man is uniquely distinguished by the capacity of self-transcendence. To describe what self-transcendence essentially *is* may be impossible. It is possible, however, to recognize it as a qualitative fact by its effects, by what it

does. For instance, the human being can and does feel and experience himself as an object, as though he were something quite separate from himself, *yet without ceasing to be conscious that he is himself, at the very instant of feeling that he is not himself—i.e.,* that he is an object. He is aware of being himself and also of not being himself at one and the same moment. To be conscious of anything at all is to feel and know it (whatever it may be) as external to oneself, as not being part of oneself. But self-consciousness is to be aware of oneself as though one were external to oneself. Self-consciousness is an activity in which the self (as subject) is transformed into an object (not-self) without ceasing to be self (subject). The self projects itself into an object, and yet continues to be subject in the process of projection. So self-transcendence may be described as the capacity of the self to make itself an object (not-self) to itself.

It is important to differentiate between "reason" and this capacity for self-transcendence. It is the confusion of the two together that vitiates the naturalistic view of man, which reduces the difference between man and the animal to a mere difference of degree, so that man becomes simply the highest, most developed animal. At the root of such an estimate is the confusion of self-transcendence or "spirit" with "reason". But the two things are not at all the same, and the difference between them emerges quite clearly in what each does. Reason is the capacity to abstract an object, to disentangle it from other objects, and to hold it in separation—*i.e.,* it is the power to reflect. But self-transcendence or spirit is a process of immediate, direct awareness. To reason is to think about; to transcend self is to be directly one with *and yet not one with*. The distinction is profound and decisive, if only because it establishes man as a being literally unique. Modern psychology leaves little doubt that animals display rudi-

mentary reasoning powers, of which human reason may <sup>1</sup> be the highest development. But there is no trace whatever of the presence of the capacity for self-transcendence in the animal. That profound mystery abides as the unique prerogative of man.

It is exactly the power to transcend himself that constitutes the problem of man's relation to Nature, of which he is quite clearly a part and also, equally clearly, not a part. It is, further, this dual situation of man in the natural order to which modern culture has so conspicuously failed to do justice. "It is not unfair to affirm that modern culture, that is, our culture since the Renaissance, is to be credited with the greatest advances in the understanding of Nature, and with the greatest confusion in the understanding of man."<sup>2</sup> Modern thought—i.e., secular, rationalist thought—is as uncomfortable and restless in the presence of the dual incompatibility of man in Nature (and history, for that matter) as a cat on hot bricks. For the truth about man in the natural order involves us in the recognition of a contradiction. It compels the admission that man is a part of nature and, at the same time, that he is not. And that reduces rationalism to chaos. But there it is. The truth about man just does not submit itself to the dearly-beloved process of systematization.

The basic fact, then, about man's place in the natural order is that he is both subject to it and transcendent over it. He stands under Nature but also rises above it. He is identified with the animal kingdom yet, at the same time, he is distinct from it. He is both animal and spirit. He is both a biological organism and a spiritual entity. In so far as he is animal, he is subject to necessity and is, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> The argument in the above section does not call for any decision of a widely-disputed point. The ultimate distinction between man and animal—i.e., spirit—is unaffected either way.

<sup>2</sup> Vide p. 3 of *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 1, by Reinhold Niebuhr.

pre-determined. In so far as he is spirit, he is endowed with the mysterious, inexplicable faculty of free will and is, therefore, self-determining. This dualism of structure is obviously inconsistent intellectually, and so offends the canons of Aristotelean logic and ordinary common sense. It doesn't make sense to say that man is both free and bound, both predetermined and self-determining. But if the first law of science, by which modern thought is dominated, is that facts must be admitted, then this dualism must be recognized as a fact, to which thought must accommodate itself. It isn't science to reject or rationalize facts because they happen to conflict with a preconceived theory or a ruling prejudice. Man, then, is a twofold being.

Christian theology interprets the dual structure of the human being by affirming, first, that man was created by God in a semblance of Himself, or, as Holy Scripture puts it, in the image of God. Man starts off with the unique endowment of being able to exercise self-determination, choice, and to act in freedom. This is the unique thing about man, whereby he is absolutely distinguished from all other forms of organic life. It is not reason, the power to reflect and to associate ideas, which may or may not be an animal potentiality, but the power to be self-determining, which is inherent in the capacity for self-transcendence. This is what is expressed in the Biblical doctrine that man was created in the image of God. In this is involved the entire order of self-consciousness and personality. It is in virtue of his capability of self-determination that man has kinship with God and can, therefore, experience fellowship with God. From all this there follows a fatally significant conclusion: since man is both animal and spirit, a created being, though uniquely created in the image of God, *Nature—i.e., the material and visible order—cannot conceivably*



*fulfil his whole being.* What man can transcend is powerless to satisfy him. This is part of the fundamental constitution of man's being, and cannot be tricked or eluded.

Nature is capable of fulfilling man as a biological organism, as a system of physical instincts, which, however, is not the whole being of man. Nature can satisfy the physical hunger. It can satisfy the urge of the sexual instinct. But in man animal is linked with spirit, which can use the physical instincts to disturb and deflect his entire being, and does, of course. Man can de-functionalize and artificially centralize his instincts—a thing which the animal cannot do. Thus sex is diverted from its natural purpose of reproduction into lust and domination. Physical appetite is diverted from its purpose of satisfying hunger into gluttony, and so on. Man as spirit thus introduces havoc into the physical order. Sexual intercourse can never satisfy lust, because lust is the sex instinct perverted to a different need. Food can satisfy hunger, but not gluttony. In the decline of Roman society, rich men's houses, it seems, were not regarded as complete without the vomitorium, to which guests could retire to vomit the contents of their over-full stomachs, so as to be able to resume their guzzling, which was diverting Nature to false ends. In this way, material repletion or satisfaction, instead of assuaging the needs of man, merely intensifies the consciousness of his spiritual vacuity and frustration. No amount of material fulfilment can even begin to satisfy the soul or spirit or whatever other term is adopted to describe that non-material element in the duality of man. "Man shall not live by bread alone." It is true, of course, that without bread life of any sort is impossible in this world. But this physical necessity is completely irrelevant to the fact that no amount of bread (plus cake and caviare) can fulfil man, that mysterious unity of body and spirit. Let

the standards of material consumption be increased to fantastic heights, man remains unfulfilled. Nature can satisfy biological organism as such, but not spirit.

Now, to deny the reality of another world, a super-temporal order of spirit, carries with it the presumption that this material, concrete world-order can, in fact, fulfil spirit. We can be certain of one thing at least : if the belief in a transcendental order beyond death is an illusion, man is unavoidably condemned to the task of trying to satisfy spirit by matter. Man, being spirit as well as animal, must seek and search for satisfaction, just as, since he is animal, he must seek for satisfaction of his bodily needs. If, then, man abandons belief in another world, he will look to the present world for the fulfilment his spirit demands, and look in vain, since matter and time have not the power to satisfy spirit. The conclusion is obvious. Man is imposing on mortal existence a burden it cannot carry. He is taxing it beyond its capacity. He is demanding from it what it can never, by the nature of things, supply. It does not need any unusual intelligence to guess what will happen. A wagon that is registered to carry ten tons breaks down under a load of a thousand tons. So this world cracks when it is subjected to a strain it cannot bear. How can it do anything else ? Life, in other words, suffers. Man dooms himself to frustration and futility. "Modern man fashioned himself for the conquest of the external world : he had faith in machines and that faith was justified by works. He projected the infantile dream of limitless power upon adult society and looked forward to a time when a push button would command food as easily as the infant's cry brings the bottle or the breast. But after four centuries of strenuous effort his mythic powers are still illusory. Despite his machines he starves in the midst of plenty : despite his knowledge of distant stars and intra-

atomic worlds, the civilization he has created has given rise to a barbarism that now has swept across the planet. In a series of world wars and world revolutions Modern Man has in fact been painfully committing suicide."<sup>1</sup> That is what happens when other-worldliness is abandoned, as modern man has been doing, progressively, for four hundred years. That is what happens when flesh is substituted for spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." It will never become anything else. "That which is born of the spirit is spirit," which also remains itself. Flesh (or world) and spirit are not interchangeable. They are for ever distinct and different orders of being. Flesh will never evolve into spirit, however much it develops, any more than a potato will turn into a pomegranate; or a frog can expand into an ox. A frog once tried to do so, with disastrous results. It simply burst.

Now, this is precisely the point we are reaching in the modern world, when human existence, as embodied in civilization, is breaking down under the strain of trying to make this realm of material order fulfil the needs and demands of a spiritual being. The frog's inflation is approximating to bursting-point. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the existence of civilized man is gravely imperilled. It is now poised on a razor edge. There is a given balance in the economy of divine Providence which Christ reveals in his warning about the use of the sword. "For they that take the sword shall perish *by the sword*." That which man perverts by a false use of it becomes the instrument for his undoing. Men who concentrate into money a whole life's significance are finally sub-humanized by money. Men who sacrifice everything to power, finally mobilize more power for their own destruction. So also existence—physical existence, into which spirit is artificially

<sup>1</sup> Vide Mr. Lewis Mumford's *The Condition of Man*, p. 264.

and wrongly concentrated—finally becomes the instrument by which spirit takes its revenge. The furies that are raging through the world to-day are the protest of spirit against the outrage committed against it by proud modern man.

By every rule of common sense, existence in this world should have become more simple, easy and assured. In actual fact, it has become more restricted, difficult and insecure. Civilization is cracking under the accumulation of the problems and contradictions of the last four centuries. The immense technical triumphs of modern man, obsessed with this present world, have become elements of instability and disintegration. This judgement is not a theological prejudice, or a clerical cry of professional woe. It is common ground between theology and secular sociology. May I submit but two instances. Here is the testimony of Alexis Carroll: "We must rescue the individual from the state of intellectual, moral and physiological atrophy brought about by modern conditions of life. . . . Despite the marvels of scientific civilization, human personality tends to dissolve. . . . It seems that modern business organization and mass production are incompatible with the full development of the human self. . . . The supremacy of matter and the dogmas of industrial religion have destroyed culture, beauty and morals . . . unintelligence is becoming more and more general, in spite of the excellence of the courses given in schools, colleges and universities."<sup>1</sup> And here is the verdict of Karl Jaspers, one of the profoundest of contemporary philosophers: "In the rationalization and universalization of the life-order there has grown contemporaneously with its fantastic success an awareness of imminent ruin tantamount to a dread of approaching end of all that makes life worth living. Not only does the apparatus seem, by its perfectionment, to

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Man the Unknown*. I regret that I have lost the page reference.

threaten the annihilation of everything; even the apparatus itself is menaced. A paradox results. Man's life has become dependent upon the apparatus, which proves, ruinous to mankind at one and the same time by its perfectionment and by its breakdown."<sup>1</sup> In terms of objective fact, civilization, the whole world-order, has become more insecure and brittle.

But this objective consequence of abandoning other-worldliness carries with it another consequence, a subjective consequence, which, in the fate to which it consigns man, is dreadful beyond all calculation. It creates and fosters a mentality which, in turn, intensifies the tendency to instability and destruction. In other words, it deepens the prevailing materialism, which is the root of the whole problem of our modern world. It is not an adequate description of materialism to state that it is simply a belief in the supremacy of matter. It becomes necessary to expose the ghastly implications of this belief for culture, for society, for politics. The dialectical materialism of Marx was less crude than the mechanical materialism of Virchow and Haeckel, in that it recognized the reality of the spiritual quality of existence. But by that very same recognition it was still more subtle and dangerous, since it derived spirit from matter, made spirit dependent on matter. It reduced spirit to mere epi-phenomenon—and that was far more dangerous. It strengthened the supreme delusion of the modern man: that a temporal world-order can satisfy self-transcending man. Culture is transformed into a subordinate of matter by being made dependant on an accumulation of things. From this is but a step to the identification of culture with wealth. A wealthy society thus becomes a cultured society, which is transparent nonsense. Are the literate masses of our industrial civilization more cultured,

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Situation of Man in the Modern World*, p. 63.

more human or humane, than the illiterate peasant, who lives in direct relation with Nature and whose mental life is sustained by the ancient lore of tradition? Let me illustrate by a concrete example.

Material interests already dominate our urban masses. I shall never forget a remark made to me by Mr. J. H. Thomas, the ex-leader of the railwaymen and Labour Cabinet Minister. He said it was absurd for Liberals and Conservatives to think that they could compete with the Socialists in offering material advantages to the masses. If the Tories offered a shilling and the Liberals one and three-pence, the Socialists would offer one and sixpence, *and win every time*. It is a fact that Socialism has won its mass support by its material promises, which, however, it won't be able to fulfil. The international anarchy will compel all governments to give the production of armaments priority over consumer goods. The ham and eggs which already loom larger than traditional liberties in the minds of the masses will have to give way to planes and powder, the production of which becomes necessary to ensure security in the enjoyment of lower standards of consumption. This is the price Europe and the world have to pay for making material values supreme.

Now take another and different example, for which I am indebted to Mr. Madariaga.<sup>1</sup> "During a general election in Spain (I believe it was in 1936) a land-worker of the South, with many years' hunger in his emaciated body, stood in a queue at a polling station in Granada. A conservative agent quietly signalled to him with a silver dollar; he just looked blank. The agent exhibited a 25-peseta note in his discreetly cupped hand. The land-worker stared. Piqued, the agent produced a 100-peseta note, a fabulous sum for the land worker, who this time

<sup>1</sup> *Victors Beware* (Jonathan Cape, 1946), pp. 81-2.

spoke, and in words the concision of which no translation can render: 'En mi hambre mando yo.' Of my hunger, I am the master." As Mr. Madariaga himself comments, that peasant saw "that liberty is more precious than ham and eggs". There was more real culture in that peasant's little finger than in the entire being of our factory-conditioned, tip-ridden masses.<sup>1</sup>

Materialism—belief that spirit is the by-product of matter—is thus comprised of two elements. First, it sees the supreme values of life in terms of material accumulation and use; and second, confidence in the power of collective man to ensure such accumulation. It is this attitude or faith, together with the mentality which it has produced, that has created our technological civilization. In its turn, this technological civilization fosters and strengthens the materialist dogma and mentality. To so great an extent does it do this, that the typical secular mind is fast becoming incapable of conceiving even the meaning of the Christian affirmation of spirit. One has but to listen to the Bernals and Haldanes and Farringtons and the rest of the Marxist fraternities to learn that they cannot think outside the terms of material production and consumption. The problem presented by the self-transcendent character of man has ceased to exist for this hardened, coagulated mind. Man's existence has shrunk to a completely one-dimension level. It is the final logic of the sin of Western civilization. The gradual emergence of man into a position of cosmic centrality has led to the abandonment of a transcendent order beyond time. In its turn, this has led to the dissolution of spirit. This merits a careful examination.

<sup>1</sup> The term "masses" in the above reference has a much wider application than the economic proletariat.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DISSOLUTION OF SPIRIT

THE very word "spirit" is synonymous with mystery, which connotes, not so much something that is not understood, as something that cannot be understood or rationally comprehended. Mystery symbolizes, not an area which yet remains to be conquered by reason, but a realm transcending the power of reason to penetrate, co-ordinate and overcome. Mystery signifies the limitation of mere rationality. It is an aspect of human experience which simply does not lend itself to the rational process, on which the post-Renaissance mind has staked everything. It is not, therefore, difficult to understand the essential resentment and hostility of the modern mind towards the mere idea of mystery. To admit mystery is also to admit a serious limitation of reason. It is exactly this limitation which the modern mind has increasingly tended to deny. Hence the modern reluctance to admit mystery, and the modern discomfort in the presence of mystery of any sort. The one admission which the dogma of human omnipotence cannot make is that, ultimately, there is any realm beyond the power of reason to explore and conquer. Mystery, therefore, has come to mean nothing more than temporary ignorance, immature science.

Many of the achievements of modern science lend a deceptive semblance of truth to this contention. Many phenomena which were once regarded as mystery have yielded to the methods of science. Plagues, which medieval man regarded as divine visitations, were shown by science to be extremely terrestrial consequences of dirt, which



vanished (or at any rate, declined) at the application of hygiene. Mr. Joseph McCabe, for instance, has made great play with the medieval processions, prayers and litanies, which proved powerless to stay disease and death. The "mystery" of such visitations as the Black Death was dissolved by soap and water. Chemistry is thus a superior agent to prayer. So the conclusion is drawn that mystery, so called, is at the mercy of advancing knowledge. In short, there is no mystery.

We see the same process in the development of psychology and its offshoot, psycho-analysis. Almost the last stronghold of mystery was the realm of mind. Now it is widely assumed that even this realm is being brought under the control of science. This belief assumes that psychology, and particularly psycho-analysis, is a science in the sense in which chemistry or physics is a science. It is a belief which is ill-founded, as the wide divergences in methods and results of the different psycho-analytic schools amply attest. But the pseudo-scientific character of psychology does nothing to arrest the decline of mystery. It hastens it, in fact. Any stripling nowadays has a pat and pert explanation for psychic and spiritual phenomena that were once looked upon as wrapped in inscrutable mystery. The jargon of the psycho-analyst has passed into the currency of common speech. Once again there is no mystery.

The apex of this modern development has been reached in the attitude induced by the study of spiritualism. It can be expressed by saying that science can extend its sway over the realm of the post-mortem. This "science", of course, is as yet only in its infancy. But it will grow. I am not presuming for a moment to pass judgement on the concrete results of psychic investigation. Any opinion I may hold in this matter is worthless. I seek simply to point out the

attitude which it has created in the popular mind, which is a further dissipation of the concept of mystery. It has strengthened the deep and widespread tendency of the modern mind to reject all mystery. It is in this tendency that the dissolution of spirit, which is the second long-distant consequence of the Renaissance revolution, becomes common, familiar and obvious. Here is the mentality, so distinctive of the modern man, which has finally resulted from the retreat away from spirit.

This retreat becomes clear and measurable in the rise of philosophical materialism. From man as "the candle of the Lord", we come to man as a mere biological organization of atoms and a biological organization of social relations. Philosophical materialism takes the two main forms of the mechanical materialism of Haeckel and Buchner and the dialectical materialism of Marx. Between these two there is no fundamental difference, in spite of the vast quantities of ink spilled in the effort to prove that there is such a difference. Lenin spoke contemptuously of the mechanical materialists, from whom, however, he did not fundamentally disagree. Both the mechanical materialist and the dialectical materialist agree that matter is the only objective reality. And that is the all-important, essential point. They differ considerably in their conception of how this reality operates and develops. But such difference is comparatively trivial. What does it signify how reality works, whether statically or dialectically (by opposites), if that reality be merely matter? If mind and spirit are only epi-phenomena, by-products, is it of any serious consequence whether they are produced by continuous straight-line development or by way of spiral opposition? If you are finally settled in your mind that matter is the only thing that counts in the definition of reality, then the mode of its operation becomes quite a secondary problem. Disagree-

ment on that point is like a dispute between people who, being agreed on their destination, cannot agree on how to get there. Shall they go by train or by bus? What does it matter? In both Buchner and Marx the revolt of Renaissance man comes to final, self-conscious fruition. In both of them, though by different routes, the wheel comes full circle. Spirit has degenerated into epi-phenomenon, into the by-product of matter in a state of complex evolution.

Mechanical materialism reduces man to an organization of atoms. When matter evolves up to a specific complex formation, as in the brain, with its nine billion cells, the result is self-consciousness or soul. Mind has no distinctive identity of its own. It is absolute by-product. Prayer, aspiration, thought, passion, all the arts, philosophy, religion—in short, all the activities characterizing man as rational, self-conscious, self-transcending being—are finally reducible to the manner in which material atoms are combined together in a single organism. In one particular mode of combination, these atoms throw off self-consciousness together with its various expressions, such as Hamlet, a Beethoven Fifth Symphony, a Rembrandt portrait, a York Minster, etc., just as rum or brandy on a Christmas pudding throws off a flame when lit. Thus it becomes possible to analyse spirit into specific chemical elements—a few grains of carbon sufficient to coat a briar pipe, sufficient sulphur to fire a toy cannon, just enough iron to make a few tonic pills, enough nitrogen to explode a squib. In the final analysis, man is five shillings' worth of chemical elements. Q.E.D. Men who are capable of believing this can believe anything. We look down to-day with infinite contempt on the credulity of medieval man, with his belief in devils, pixies, fairies and hobgoblins. But he was a hardened sceptic compared to the super-credulous modern materialist, who is equal to believing that spirit is a chemical

by-product. Materialism, too, has its superstitions, no less renowned than those of religion.

Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, transforms spirit into a sociological organism, so that man is nothing more than "the ensemble of social relations"—that is to say, the point at which society becomes aware of its own existence and inter-relations. Personality has no individual identity whatsoever. It is wholly social. Marxism represents the extreme opposite of capitalist atomism and leaves no room at all for man as individual, self-conscious spirit. Individuals are merely cells in an organism. Society is a biological unit. Marx was certainly aware of the element of paradox in social development, but he completely failed to grasp the paradox of the Christian view of man: that man is both an independent individual and a dependent being; that he has an independent existence in a relation of social dependence. Marx, in short, was not dialectical enough.

Now, observe what actually happens in this denial of spirit. By making spirit a by-product of matter, matter is endowed with the qualities of spirit. Thus matter becomes unconscious spirit. It then acts like spirit, but unconsciously, haphazardly and blindly, which, consequently, reduces the universe to irrationality. In the name of reason and science, the world is reduced to final unreason. This, indeed, is the ultimate, cruel paradox in which every materialism is inevitably involved. First, it denies spirit, which drives it to the distortion of being and in so doing finally plunges existence into irrationality. It is no accident that, in the twentieth century, we have seen philosophy plunge from materialism to irrationalism. Buchner and Marx give way to Spengler and Klages. From Rationalism (supremacy of reason), the road winds to Materialism and thence by a dire descent to Irrationalism.

In Descartes (1596-1650), Renaissance man who, let it be repeated, initiated the process of making humanity a self-existent absolute, comes to philosophical clarity. Descartes it was who first clearly and systematically formulated the thesis of the supremacy of reason. He is the father of modern rationalism. *Cogito ergo sum* is the first and quite possibly the most disastrous of the modern slogans. "I think, therefore I am" is the germ of Western calamity. *It derives being from reason*. Reason is the dominating, fundamental certitude of life. In due course, reason is projected into mechanical causality, which, in turn, fortifies the dogma of the supremacy of reason. Nature is patterned according to mechanics. Thus, reason, which initially affirms man's mastery over Nature, by introducing the concept of mechanical causality, subjects both Nature and society to necessity, and so leads inevitably to the protest of irrationality, which has engulfed Europe in the tragedy and suffering that we know to-day. Cartesianism pictured the world as a closed system. Man, who has freedom in the abyss of his being, can never accept life as a closed system without doing violence to his whole being.

The Cartesian principle of mechanical causality, which was first applied to Nature, was later applied to society. La Mettrie (1702-51) developed Cartesianism into a thorough-going materialism. "The rise of temperature under the influence of enthusiasm and the mental agitation produced by fevers can only be explained on the theory that what we call the soul consists of pure matter."<sup>1</sup> Von Holbach (1723-81) went farther along the road to sheer materialism. The assumption of any need for mind he attributed to ignorance. By the end of the nineteenth century, materialism had become the dominant habit of thought. "The materialistic attitude is not limited to the

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 121, *Brief History of Modern Philosophy*, by Hoffding.

explicitly materialistic theories. It began long before Marxism, and, from the nineteenth century on has dominated all learning and the intellectual outlook of all classes of the population.”<sup>1</sup> From the Rationalism of Descartes, modern European thought has led in a straight line to an all-pervading Materialism.

A Rationalism which develops at length into Materialism does not, however, end there. Materialism itself becomes a point of departure for a new development which, in Europe, has taken the form of a revolt against reason. This revolt has been stimulated (*a*) by the Socialist Movement in certain of its forms, (*b*) by psycho-analysis and (*c*) by the Romantic protest against capitalist civilization. I do not mean by this that the Socialist Movement is wholly irrational, that psycho-analysis is entirely anti-reason or that Romanticism is wholly evil. On the contrary, like all human movements and institutions, these three activities are a mixture of good and evil, of the rational and the irrational. It is, nevertheless, a fact that in the course of their development they have embodied the growing tendency towards irrationalism, and, as we shall see, have resulted in an inversion of the concept of mystery.

The Socialist Movement was itself an offshoot of Rationalism, as a study of its origins and early beginnings clearly proves. It rested on a materialistic ideology. Its early pioneers were all rationalists, mostly atheists and deists—Fourier, Babeuf, Hall, St. Simon, Robert Owen, etc. It arose out of the revolutionary myth of primeval idealism, the myth of a primeval golden age, with which Rousseau doped an entire era. It was the product of the distinctive modern dogma of the perfectibility of human nature. There was nothing abysmal or mysterious about man. The source of the evil by which society was afflicted was

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 479, *Man the Measure*, by Erich Kahler.

bad institutions. In this phase, Socialism was predominantly rational.

But with the growth of historical knowledge and the consequent development of the historical attitude, which found its champion in Marx, Socialism, under the guise of science, veered in the direction of irrationalism on the Continent. It followed a different line here in England, where the religious tradition exercised a more dynamic influence. Socialism in England developed elements of semi-Christian idealism. It became a confusing mish-mash of heterogeneous and conflicting emotions and ideas. Secular and Christian elements made up a confused political pattern. But on the Continent the Socialist Movement, under the lash of Marx, developed towards violence and irrationalism. It demonstrated a cynical historic irony. Beginning as the disciple of Hegel, the high-priest of absolute reason, Marx, quite unwittingly no doubt, degraded reason and spirit. By a severely rational analysis, he arrived at the conclusion that culture was a by-product of irrational class and social conflicts. Philosophy, law, religion, literature grew out of the necessities of economic production. The profound and considerable element of truth in this analysis did not protect the Socialist Movement from becoming violent and irrational. The Marxian concept of dictatorship had implications which Marx and Engels never suspected. It was left to Sorel and the Syndicalists to bring them out into the open and to reveal the primary significance of violence. A movement which began with an arid, desiccated rationalism has degenerated into cruelty, violence and tyranny—all in the name of science and reason. In Soviet Communism, reason has become the lackey of unreason.

Similar has been the effect of the development of psycho-analysis. It has, wittingly or unwittingly, stimulated and

strengthened the tendency to irrationalism. This was inevitable. The exposure of the Liberal delusion about human nature, that man is fundamentally good and rational, increased the influence of the disintegrating factors at work in European civilization. If I may put it thus, psycho-analysis, *as a philosophy* (i.e., Freudianism) far more than as a method, afforded a rational justification for irrational behaviour. Freudianism provided a semi-respectable pretext for abandoning civilized restraints. It weakened traditional checks upon anti-social, irrational conduct. I am not saying for a moment that Freud intended this. He most certainly did not. But his good intentions proved to be no barrier against bad effects. The philosophy which Freud compounded out of his clinical investigations stimulated and intensified the tendencies making for the degradation of reason. A single example must serve to indicate the process.

In the Freudian teaching, the concept of guilt is fundamental. It is, says Freud, the source of man's entire psychic conflict. It is the survival in the modern man's Unconscious of racial taboos and fears. It springs mainly from the father-complex, the jealousy that the son feels towards the father who deprives him of the sole possession of the mother. The son desires to oust the father completely. In numerous ways this fatal desire leads to the violation of tribal taboo and institutions, all of which forms part of our racial heritage. This constitutes the sense of guilt, which is repressed into the Unconscious. The essential thing is to bring all this repressed matter into consciousness, in the course of which *the sense of guilt will vanish*. So by psycho-logical analysis, man can cure his deepest disease. Modern civilization is a progressive process in the removing of limitations on human power. In psycho-analysis, man is on the verge of omnipotence by the dissolution of his sense of



guilt, which is the most radical, ancient and universal characteristic of human nature. Since man is not spirit; since he is only matter, then obviously guilt is only an irrational survival. Ergo—abolish the sense of guilt!

Now, all the protests and disclaimers in the world will not alter one simple fact: that the disappearance of a sense of guilt cannot but result in making sanctions and morality completely and finally relative—*i.e.*, in the absolute abolition of all morality. It will make power internally absolute. It will remove the one effective check upon power, the check of conscience; for guilt and conscience are co-ordinates. One of the most amazing phenomena of the modern world is the apparent unawareness of the thorough-going Freudian materialist of the gigantic problem involved in the human consciousness of guilt. It is the one guarantee of society against absolute tyranny and absolute anarchy into which tyranny inevitably declines. When morality is reduced to social convenience, power becomes final and absolute. Who is to decide what social convenience is? The last twenty-five years in Europe furnishes the conclusive answer: *it is the power-holding minority in the State*. Social convenience in Nazi Germany was whatever the Nazis decided was necessary to ensure Nazi survival. The same thing precisely is true to-day of Soviet Russia. By reducing guilt to a mere racial leftover, Freudianism sanctions an a-moral irrationalism.

Romanticism is a definite feature of social development in almost every historical era. It is born out of man's protest against civilization in every age. It has therefore a profound survival value. It is a vehicle of the spiritual aspirations which civilization tends to thwart. It is a necessary part of the tension of historic existence. Romanticism has been in Europe the source of some of the greatest

achievements in literature and art. But, like every other movement of the human spirit in post-Renaissance Europe, Romanticism has been corrupted and perverted. It has become an instrument of sheer nihilism. Nazism, in fact, has been supremely the embodiment of the modern Romantic Movement. In protest against the deadly impositions of our civilization upon the human spirit, Romanticism in the form of Nazism has given supreme sanction to irrationalism, a-morality and collectivism. In Hitler, the irrational will and dynamic of an entire people were concentrated in a demonic fury, which has left behind it a wilderness of destruction and wounds in the spirit of man, which may never heal.

The Germany which gave to the world the apostle of Absolute Reason in the person of Hegel also gave the satan of irrationalism, of absolute unreason, in the person of Adolf Hitler. And there is the mystery, the demonic mystery, which an age that had rejected divine mystery has been compelled to face, by the grim and sinister irony of history. The mystery of Hitler is a *fait accompli* of history. It is being said nowadays that a great book has yet to be written about Hitler, when we know more about him. It seems that we don't *know* enough about him to solve the mystery—which is true. But shall we ever know enough? Historians are no nearer solving the puzzle of Napoleon's personality to-day than they were a hundred years ago, in spite of greater documentary accumulations. The little Corsican still preserves his secret. I have never subscribed to the opinion of Hitler's inferiority to Napoleon. There can, in my judgement, be little doubt that Hitler was a bigger mystery, more inscrutable, than Napoleon. The gap between personality and performance is far wider in Hitler's case than in his Corsican forerunner.

Here is a pretty problem for a world that rejected mystery.

How to account for the mystery of Hitler? How did a neurotic like Hitler come to be the master of Europe? One thing seems quite plain: there was a profound affinity between Hitler and his age. He was the incarnation of the irrationalism to which the worship of reason had finally degenerated. He was the de-humanized soul in a de-humanized civilization, the final fruit, rotten-ripe, of the Renaissance affirmation of Man as absolute. In a world that had been irresponsibly tinkering with the game of being its own god, Hitler set to it in real earnest. The divine mystery of man as spirit, which modern civilization finally rejected, returned in demonic shape to plague and torment and destroy.

Modern Europe begins by elevating man into the centre of being, a place that can be rightfully occupied only by God. This issues gradually and imperceptibly into obsession with this present world, to a one-dimension existence. Concentration on this world leads, in time, via man's extending sway over Nature, to the absorption of spirit into matter. Spirit is dethroned. All this process we have attempted to trace. Some of its results we have also analysed. But there is one aspect of the process and result which has yet to be noted. *It is the new type of man produced by it all.* Helen Iswolsky has written of the Soviet Man of to-day. Rohder wrote of Renaissance individual man. Berdyaev has written about the difference between the mental structure of the modern man and that of medieval man. Is there any concrete, objective substance behind all these statements? Or are they only words, expressing merely vague apprehensions?

We may glean a fairly definite hint, at least, from the concept of mystery presented here. Awareness of mystery, like guilt, has hitherto been a basic constituent of human nature. It has been an inheritance of the individual in

every age.<sup>1</sup> From time immemorial, the being of man has been invested with a profound sense of mystery. In a world which was all of it mysterious, man himself was the most mysterious of all. In primitive society the mystery of man was first sensed in the phenomenon of sleep. What was this strange thing, this death in life? Indeed, primitive man never clearly distinguished between sleep and death. Sleep was a brief death, and death a long sleep. Whatever it was, it certainly was a mystery, in the presence of which primitive man felt a deep sense of awe. The mystery was deepened by dreams, which gave rise to the idea of the soul. In dreams, the living breath escaped and went roaming in a remote, ghostly world of its own. But it always came back. Death was distinguished from sleep by the delay in the return of the soul to the body. So in the first stages of civilization, as in Egypt, tombs are stocked with food and other necessities, so that when the soul does return, the means of sustenance will be at hand.

Now, this sense of mystery with which man was invested in primitive experience characterized all pre-Christian thinking about man. The materialism of Democritus in Athens and of Lucretius in Rome was an exceptional freak in ancient thought about the being of man. In all pre-Christian speculation, the mystery of the soul was a dominating fact. In Plato the soul was the supreme reality. The world of the soul was the real world, of which the world of time and space was but the shadow. That tradition dominated ancient philosophy and passed over into Christian thinking. We find the sense of mystery about man in Hebrew thinking. "What is man that Thou hast made him?" asks the Psalmist. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." This was the Jew's answer to the great mystery.

<sup>1</sup> I must apologise to the reader for some repetition in this part of the argument.

In medieval, Christian thinking this sense of mystery came to full self-consciousness in the doctrine of the divine creation. Man is a creature, but a unique creature. God created man, but not as He created the rest of the universe. "Let us make man in our own image," says Genesis. Though a creature, therefore finite and material, man is also capable of fellowship with God; for he has been made like God, and therefore there is something infinite and spiritual in him. This is the glory of man. But this is also his eternal mystery.

Modern man has undergone an abysmal, silent, revolutionary change of character. He is no longer dominated by any awareness of mystery. If this is a sign of progress, then modern man is approximating to perfection. Man has been a proud creature in every age. But there is cast-iron in the pride of the man of to-day, because it lacks the tension of mystery. Power of description has become so glib and facile, that the sense of awe and wonder has gone dim. There are pat explanations for everything. Sin, for instance. What is sin? This vast, abysmal, universal, persistent mystery of irrationality? Mr. H. G. Wells has the answer. "Mystery? Nonsense, my dear Sir." "A little less of the classics and a trifle more of biology, and the psycho-analysts would have understood that this 'sense of sin' of theirs is neither more nor less than the natural discomfort of an imperfectly developed animal to its environment. It has no more to do with some profound universal conviction of transgression than a coat that is tight under the arms or the wrong spectacles."<sup>1</sup> It is as simple as that. All plain as a pikestaff—plainer, in fact. What is man? Pat comes the answer in the same novel.

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 113. *You Can't be too Careful*. Since he wrote this novel, Mr. Wells has confessed his final despair, which he published in his *Mind at the End of Its Tether*. I, at any rate, prefer Mr. Wells of the final phase to the cocksure Wells of the earlier phase.

Man is "this lonely-spirited ape, for this is what we still are fundamentally. . . . The urgency we are under to pull ourselves together and make an acceptable account of ourselves finds its outlet in these yarns about religious experience." In one magnificent infantile gesture, Mr. Wells here sweeps away "as rubbish to the void", all the ageless traditions of the human race. He was simply doing self-consciously what our Western civilization has been doing unconsciously.

Another example of the same mentality is the attitude towards love and sex: it is reduced to physical terms. What is the explanation of romantic love and sex affinity? It is nothing more mysterious than glands. The explanation may be complex, but not mysterious. It's a matter of adrenalin and pituitary. Hence marriage becomes a glandular contract. If spirit is dissolved into glandular substance, the sanctity of marriage will also be dissolved.

The dissolution of spirit then issues into a mentality which moves almost wholly on the level of the objective and the concrete, which means that it is shallow. Causes and their interpretation lie on the surface. Even psychoanalysis seeks to formulate the unconscious depths of being in concrete terms. It is a mentality which is at home only with the machine and its pre-determined necessities. It is a mentality which is being adapted to external necessity. It tends to function in one dimension only. Ideas can be appropriated only by being "sloganized", which means generalizing a generalization. "Give us this day our daily slogan." In the slogan-fed mind of the modern mass-man, we have the absolute antithesis of mystery. This, perhaps, may prove to be the most calamitous consequence of the transmutation of spirit into matter.

In the Renaissance, says Berdyaev, there takes place the second fall of man. Humanity makes itself absolute.

From this there follows a train of evil consequences, among which we have traced, first, the abandonment of a transcendent, other-worldly order and, second, the abolition of spirit or its absorption into matter. But the story doesn't end there. A new career of de-humanization opens out. Civilization enters upon a descent into a new degradation and barbarism, in which consequence assumes flesh and visible, historic shape.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DEGRADATION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

It may be well at this point to pause in our analysis, so as to survey the ground we have traversed thus far. In our five preceding chapters we have attempted to examine certain profound and revolutionary changes in the whole outlook and attitude of the modern man.<sup>1</sup> These changes in beliefs, ideas and assumptions have been the result of the fundamental departure, during the Renaissance, from the theocentric faith of orthodox, Catholic Christianity, which prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, to the anthropocentric faith that is the distinctive characteristic of the modern man. This "fundamental departure" is the tap-root of what has followed since. Let me repeat it. It was a radical change in the belief concerning the relation between man and God, in which man displaces God as the centre of being and life. The idea of the transcendence of God progressively declines under the growing dominance of the idea of the immanence of God. God as diffused, subjective influence and tendency. In actual experience, the very idea of God as Person, Holy, Sovereign and Transcendent,

<sup>1</sup> The reader is referred once again to Mr. Lewis Mumford's *The Condition of Man*. "The concept of Modern Man must be taken as an historical term which covers a type of existence, a mode of thought and social life, an ego and a super-ego, which first took shape around the fifteenth century. The word modern was used to distinguish the contemporary beliefs of this period from those which were held by the ancients: later it became a term of special eulogy, as the moderns became more proud of their achievements and more confident of their position. Nothing that twentieth-century man sang in self-praise could surpass that which Voltaire bestowed on the seventeenth century. And by now the triumph of modern man has resulted in a profound irony: he himself is dated—as dated as the 'advanced' men and women in Bernard Shaw's early plays." P. 263.



has gradually and imperceptibly whittled down to an idea of God as a vague inner stimulus to human effort and omnipotence. The whole situation of the Christian Church and Gospel in society undergoes a calamitous change. From being the judge and arbiter of society, Christianity is degraded into the position of being the handmaid and drudge of civilization.

It is not possible to exaggerate the enormity and significance of the modern man's fundamental departure from theocentric to anthropocentric faith. The history of Europe during the last four hundred years has conclusively shown that it has been fatal. Nothing manifests the profound levity and irresponsibility of the typical secular man so much as his assumption that theology is a purely abstract intellectual activity, devoid of practical significance. We shall deal more thoroughly with the decisive question of the relevance of theology to contemporary civilization at a later stage of the argument. Meanwhile it is sufficient to emphasize the deadly character of the assumption of the irrelevance of theology, not just to the whole fellowship of the Church, but also—and fully as much—to the most secular activities of civilized society. That assumption has been incomparably the most costly error in the whole history of man. All political and social questions, at their root, are theological, as Lord Acton so acutely realized. All human relationships stem from the deeper and primal relationship between man and God. Absolutely.

The vital significance of theology for the Church ought surely to be obvious—ought to be, but in fact it is not. It is rare nowadays to come across a theologically-minded layman, especially in the Church of England. The Anglican laity, generally speaking, is, in all probability, the least theologically minded of all. At any rate, it is impossible to imagine a greater lack of theological-mindedness than

that of the Anglican laity. If you get into conversation with a Scotsman, the chances are that, in due course, as one topic leads to another, you will at last be talking theology. But that is far less likely to happen with the Englishman, and still less with the Anglican. The theologically minded Anglican layman is rarer than rubies. If he were not, there would be no need to defend the place of theology in the fellowship of the Church. It is, alas ! So little is it realized what happens in fundamental theological change. When men lose the idea of God as objective, Holy, Transcendent Person, to whom man must be wholly subordinate and obedient, all sorts of things begin to happen. God ceases to be thought of as Person and tends to become "a stream of tendency making for righteousness", righteousness being effectively identified with secular progress. From this the vulgarization of the whole Christian faith follows in due course.

This radical change in the belief about God led, as we have seen, to two other decisive, determining *theological* changes. (We are still concerned with the theological aspect.) First, it led toward the conversion of this present world into *the* arena of human destiny, the place of man's fulfilment and final achievement. The belief that this world derived its significance from its relation to a world beyond itself gradually and progressively withered to the point of atrophy, which is its condition in the contemporary mind. Where the belief in a transcendent world-order still continues to exist, it exists merely as a devitalized appendix, a thing of dead nerves. By the transformation of this world into the scene of destiny, the necessity for another world vanishes completely. An ethereal Heaven is translated into a concrete, secular Utopia, which, being always "just round the corner", commands man's enthusiastic assent and belief. It is a solid, substantial, material structure, in which

knobs and push-buttons have displaced angels as the servants of man's comfort. "An acre in Middlesex," as that supreme bourgeois, Mr. Thomas Babington Macaulay, once expressed it, "is better than a principality" in a transcendent future. A bird, not yet but very nearly, in hand is worth many more than two in an ethereal bush, which appears as insubstantial as a mirage. When, as is generally assumed, man has already got the bird of the earthly paradise by the tail, he ceases to be interested in the promise of a heavenly paradise.

The second theological change—a change carrying more immediately visible philosophical and sociological consequences—is the reduction of spirit, with its aura of mystery, into matter. The essential significance of this change is its functional value. Its whole point is to adapt the divinely created two-dimensional being of man to this world, which is being artificially charged with final destiny. To be capable of ensuring final destiny, this world is endowed with a pseudo-infinity, and in order to fit himself into this pseudo-infinity, man has to be invested with a pseudo-finiteness. After all, it is but fair to give and take! A world which carries Utopia within its womb demands a radically different type of man from a world doomed to frustration of any hope of terrestrial bliss. A type of man has to be created for whom the human achievement can have the value of the divine gift. Being powerless to supply what the deep spirit of man needs, this world is faced with the problem of so changing the spirit of man that it will need what the world can supply. It is the ancient dodge of learning to like what you can get, when you can't get what you like. So spirit is transformed into matter. A new type of man begins to emerge with a capacity for deriving ecstasy from spirit transformed into matter. This is the essential, unvarnished reality of the modern man as

contrasted with medieval man. He has been conditioned to accept the tin whistle as a satisfactory substitute for the silver trumpet.

What a perfectly beautiful, idyllic world it would be if theory and practice were entirely dissociated; if, that is to say, conduct were determined only by desires and never by ideas. Then changes in the realm of thought would be utterly immaterial, and Alice's Wonderland would descend from the world of fantasy into the world of prosaic fact. But this all-too-too-heavy world is not a bit like that. Theory and practice interact and interpenetrate. Changes in the mind carry inescapable consequences in social and personal behaviour and relations. Above all, theological changes are decisive for social institutions and for historical development. I have already alluded to the fatal character of theology for civilization. Let it be re-affirmed and emphasized here. In the long run (which, by the way, tends to get shorter and shorter) theology is the finally deciding factor in social change. It is the primal, fontal factor. Sociology is derivatory, secondary, consequential. Social values derive from dogma. The complete unawareness of this dependence by the secular, progressive mind is itself the eloquent proof of the profound change of mentality which modern man has suffered—suffered literally rather than enjoyed. Only a one-eyed mind (with the remaining one cock-eyed) surely could agree that what men think about the nature of ultimate reality has no bearing on social change? To which the reader may respond by saying that nobody is so foolish as to contend such a thing. The writer is obviously engaged in putting up his own Aunt Sallies merely for the fun of knocking them down again! But what is the effective, pragmatic difference between saying (a) that thought about ultimate reality is of no social consequence, and (b) that theology is not thinking about

ultimate reality? There is a verbal and a formal difference. But where is the substantial difference? In the actual result, theology is ruled out altogether. And it is to this imbecility that the modern secular mind has wedded itself—one marriage at last in which divorce is inconceivable!

Theological changes do not stand alone, the truth of which is increasingly attested in volumes of blood and disaster by the last four centuries of world history. Theological changes never, never stand alone. It is high time that people who make any pretensions to intelligence, whether they be Christian or secularist, should abandon the fantastic assumption that theology is a remote, irrelevant, merely astrological activity of the human mind; that it operates in a vacuum and does not, therefore, affect the sphere of social, practical experience. Theology produces the most startling effects in economics, in sociology, in politics—above all and overwhelmingly, in politics. Theological changes in a distant past involve vast changes, throughout an era of historical development, in the economic structure of society, in the international political relations of nations and races, and in the cultural values of a whole civilization. At long last, it is fundamentally because of what European peoples came to believe centuries ago about God and man that millions of Europeans and Asiatics are to-day under-nourished and threatened with starvation. Theological upheaval in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has carried in its train a barely tolerable increase in the price of tobacco in the twentieth century, a shift in the balance of expenditure between the State and the citizen, and a grave disparity between capital and consumer production four hundred years later. It was the lovable G. K. Chesterton who once remarked, in his uniquely whimsical way, that the most important consideration for a landlady regarding a prospective lodger was not his income but his

philosophy, because his expenditure of his income would be determined by his philosophy. This impeccable principle can be applied with double force to the relation between theology and civilization. The nature of the institutions and social relations of any given civilization are decided, at the last, by the theological ideas and beliefs of men. These are the ruling forces. The past theological changes that have occupied the reader's attention so far have issued into equally vast social and political consequences. Let us note some of them.

We may note at the outset in this interaction of theology and the development of civilization the operation of a dialectic far more grim than the dialectic that obsessed Karl Marx. It is a dialectic which concentrates in itself the essence of the multitudinous changes that have bedevilled Western society. By investing man with the quality of an Absolute, and so attributing to him a false supremacy, our civilization finds itself in the toils of a new slavery. By aspiring to independence and self-existence, man finds himself subjected to a new necessity, which works out in terms of a new degradation of the human individual, who is literally de-graded, de-moted. When the finite creature, man, forgets his creatureliness and acts as though he were absolute—*i.e.*, as though he were god—he opens the door to a new devilry, which is made a thousand times more devilish by the tremendous technical triumphs of a perverted science. Out of the radical *theological* changes in the heart and mind of modern European man has developed a completely new, unprecedented social process of the mechanization of society. To mechanize man is also to de-humanize him. Man and machine are absolute antitheses. The one process automatically ensures the other. The essence of personality is freedom, self-determination, spontaneity. The essence of the machine is necessity, pre-

determination and repetition. The entire action of the machine is foreordained, confined to a given path of movement, like the piston, for instance. Man, in so far as he is rooted in nature, is of course subject to an inevitable degree of necessity, anyhow. The most elementary occupation of man—farming—dictates a kind of routine. But the enormous growth of the machine has immensely enlarged the sphere of necessity in human behaviour. So inured are we to the machine, that we don't realize it. Workers in leather tanneries after a while become insensitive to the sheer stink of their work. So the man of the machine age has become inured to necessity. As mechanization extends, the sphere in which man can act as personality (*i.e.*, freely and spontaneously) contracts. He, too, tends to become a machine, which means that he is being de-humanized. He is passively submitting to an external condition, which is the utter antithesis of active response to inner impulse and will.

This process of mechanization has now invaded the sphere of mind, the result of which is the emergence of Mass-Man. That is to say, vast numbers of men and women in present-day industrialized society display the same passivity in their mental processes as they do in their physical.<sup>1</sup> When the alarm-clock strikes, the body makes certain movements, just as Pavlov's dogs drooled saliva when a bell rang. When certain words and phrases are uttered, the mind registers automatic assent or dissent, like pushing a button. It is on this principle that mass-propaganda is operated. It operates to effect certain automatic responses. "Volk", "class", "bourgeoisie", or whatever the word or pattern or picture, starts a train, not of thought, but of automatic, passive responses. It is the bell which releases mental secretion.

<sup>1</sup> I prefer to say "vast numbers of men and women" to the use of the phrase "the average man", who is an indefinite myth. "Vast numbers" does convey a concrete meaning, at least.

It is a fundamental misconception to think of mass-propaganda as an instrument for inducing conviction or for forming opinion by means of argument or the conveying of information. Mass-propaganda aims at something entirely different—namely, the eliciting of a passive response, of an automatic series of mental reactions. *It presupposes a mechanized, de-humanized individual*, whose existence has come about as the result of the too-fundamental theological changes already discussed—namely, the abandonment of other-worldliness and the dissolution of spirit.

Thus in our highly technical and completely secular civilization, the human status of man—man as spirit, as personality, as moral agent—has declined as never before. It is more anti-human, in my judgement, than the degradation and the violence of the workers in the early years of the Industrial Revolution. Their drunkenness and violence and brutishness were, in their way, the protest of beings who were still personal against the injustice they suffered. But man to-day, mass-man, is passively submitting to the new slavery gradually creeping upon him. Mr. Lewis Mumford coined for this attitude a really striking phrase—"passive barbarism". "We have created a new race, with healthy physiques, sometimes beautiful bodies, but empty minds: people who have accepted life as an alternation of meaningless routine with insignificant sensation. . . . At their best, these passive barbarians live on an innocent animal level: they sun-tan their bodies, sometimes at vast public bathing beaches, sometimes under a lamp. They dance, whirl, sway, in mild orgies of vacant sexuality, or they engage in more intimate felicities without a feeling, a sentiment, or an ultimate intention that a copulating cat would not equally share. They dress themselves carefully within the range of uniformity dictated by fashion. Their hair is curled by a machine; and what passes for



thought or feeling is also achieved, passively through the use of a machine : the radio or the moving pictures to-day, or Aldous Huxley's 'feelies' to-morrow. . . . Shopgirls and clerks, millionaires and mechanics, share the same underlying beliefs, engage in the same practices. . . . Half dead in their work; half alive outside their work. This is their destiny. Every big city counts such people by the million; even the smaller provincial centres . . . produce their full share of people equally empty of human standards and aims."<sup>1</sup> Here are the millions who have been de-spiritualized as the result of the abandonment of Christian dogmas and values. They are fruit ripe for plucking by mass-propaganda. Pull the strings and they jerk and caper accordingly. Created in God's Image, our secular, technical civilization is recreating them in the totalitarian image.

What has happened to that ambitious Renaissance vision of a world of bold, free and gay *individuals*? The reality to which it has faded is this raucous, strident world of robots. I remember many years ago paying sixpence to view what was advertised as the most marvellous invention of the age. It was the Mechanical Man, a fearsome contraption of metal, wires and bulbs. You pressed a button—ah! those push-buttons—and the thing jerked and walked and spoke. But it was very crude. The spirit of our civilization has taken on the job of creating the Mechanical Man in real earnest. It retains the body of flesh and automatizes the mind and soul—a far superior job. It looks exactly as if it's got a soul. They have souls, of course, but shrunken and so withered. This is the world into which the Renaissance has crystallized, a world of automatized souls. Penny in the slot.

This process reveals the operation of a sinister dialectic, according to which vision and intention, in the course of

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 29, *Faith for Living* (Secker & Warburg, 1941).

materialization, turn into their opposite. Can one look, for instance, at contemporary France without wondering whether there isn't some worm of corruption and destruction at work in the vitals of civilization? Does it not suggest, at least, second thoughts about the Great Revolution? That golden dawn on 1789, about which Carlyle indulged in such quantities of verbal diarrhoea, with its promise of liberty, equality and fraternity? Within a few years it deluged Europe in a blood-bath, and clamped down on it the chains of tyranny. *Le petit caporal* became the jailor. Post-revolutionary France has had a hundred years of torment, strife and national bitterness and has been a divided people. France finally bred its Two Hundred Families, its Nineteen Political Parties, and last of all, as one born out of due time, a Maurice Thorez, Communist Vice-President, a specialist in the art of treachery. The Renaissance vision of freedom has become the new slavery of technical, twentieth-century man. A very grim dialectic indeed! The detailed demonstration of this whole process of the mechanization and degradation of man would require an ample volume. But let us look at a few examples.

We have to note, first, the de-humanization of labour in the whole economic sphere of our world, in which men and women and children, both employed and *employer*, are being subjected to a process of de-personalization. Their manhood is being subordinated to their productive function. They function as instruments of non-human purposes. In capitalist civilization the chief non-human objective is private profit, which is the acid test of all economic undertakings. In the early beginnings of capitalist production (*i.e.*, of production for a market), profit was closely related to human welfare and purpose. But in the expansion of capitalist productive forces, profit has been divorced almost

completely from humanity. The personality of the producer has been absorbed by his function.

The significance of this result (the instrumentalization of the producer) can be more clearly appreciated if it is contrasted with medieval practice. In the medieval era, economic relations were subject to the law of the Just Price, which simply meant the real cost of production, the cost of the materials and labour-time. Any price exceeding the cost of these two elements was unjust and sinful.<sup>1</sup> Thus usury was regarded as a sin, in spite of its widespread practice. It is true, of course, that the law of the Just Price was partly a reflection of the simpler economic structure of medieval society, in which the relation between the serf and his over-lord, between the master-craftsman and his apprentices and journeymen was far more personal than the capitalist. "Employer" in the Middle Ages meant chiefly one who employed others to supplement his own labour. Employer and employee worked together side by side, and frequently lived together. Their functional distinction did not carry with it any divisive social distinctions. Whilst it is true that medieval society was heirarchical, it did not imply any loss of human dignity in the subordinate grades. A revealing illustration of this is provided by a medieval Spanish custom which still obtains—so I am informed—in parts of Andalusia. It was the general practice to address beggars by the same title as the respectable citizen. That title was "Your Honour", which was a way of acknowledging that the beggar was also a man, a human being. But manhood, humanity, no longer commands honorific titles, which are now reserved for professional function. One must become a stipendiary

<sup>1</sup> I am neither so naïve or unhistorical as to imagine that economic life in the Middle Ages was conducted in strict accordance with the Just Price. It wasn't—far from it. But the transgression of it was more conducive to a feeling of guilt than the concept of profit.

magistrate at the very least to be addressed as "Your Honour" nowadays.

Modern civilization has witnessed an inversion of human values. Nobody has described this process and result so eloquently as Marx in the Communist Manifesto. "Wherever the Bourgeoisie has risen to power, it has destroyed all feudal, patriarchal and idyllic relationships. It has ruthlessly torn asunder motley feudal ties that bound men to their 'natural superiors' and has left no other bond between man and man but crude self-interest and unfeeling 'cash payment'. It has drowned pious zeal, chivalrous enthusiasm and humdrum sentimentalism in the chill waters of selfish calculation. It has degraded personal dignity to the level of exchange value." It is all concentrated in the fundamental economic theory of capitalism, *in which labour is an item in the cost of production*. This criticism of capitalism was the humane and illuminating achievement of the Guild-Socialists in the years immediately preceding the first world war, before the domination of English socialism by Marxism came to befoul and poison the whole anti-capitalist movement. Their case against capitalism was essentially Christian. Capitalism, said the Guild Socialists, violated personality.<sup>1</sup> Labour is not raw material, but living men and women, immortal souls, who, by being degraded into raw material, suffer violence and de-humanization. Wages, being merely an item of cost of production, economically crystallized the sub-human status of labour. By placing labour—i.e., living men—on the same basis as raw material in the productive process, capitalist society degraded the producer, and from this depression of the worker down to the sub-human level sprang most of the abuses of world capitalism.

<sup>1</sup> Vide e.g., the works of S. G. Hobson, *The World of Labour* by G. D. H. Cole (1913), and the weekly issues of *The New Age* between 1909 and 1912, before Orage, its editor, was diverted into the bogland of the Douglas Theory.

Consider, as an example, the ghastly abuse of the capitalist exploitation of primitive and colonial peoples in Africa, India, South America, China, the Malay States and other lands. No ancient tradition, no established institution, no native interest was respected in the terrible drive for markets and raw materials and imperial aggrandisement. Human beings, black, brown and white, were savagely subjected to a soulless process of economic exploitation. African natives—*e.g.*, in Kenya—were deprived of their land and then taxed in order to compel them to provide the cheap labour for tropical production. The Indian out-caste was enslaved by a system of perpetual debt, in which the native Indian capitalist played a prominent part. The African native was subjected to the atrocities of the slave-trade. The Chinese were exploited in the industrial hells of Shanghai and the Treaty ports. A century earlier our own people were compelled to endure similar horrors in the Industrial Revolution, the description of which in the restrained pages of Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Hammond can even now rouse one to hot anger. There is nothing comparable to it in human history until we come to the hells of the Soviet concentration labour camps.

Another concrete example of the modern degradation of the human person is the way in which prostitution has been commercialized and organized as an international business. Very little credence need be given to the more sensational stories told about the White-Slave traffic. Prostitution is one of the most ancient and persistent social evils, with which personal character has far more to do than has economic circumstance. Poverty of morals is a more powerful factor in prostitution than poverty of purse, as is proved by the fact that prostitution is a permanent institution in every social system. It was rampant in medieval, Christian Europe. But only in modern civilization has it

been organized as a business, with all the paraphernalia and devices of an international monopoly, which withstood all the efforts of the League of Nations to stamp it out. Before the war it was an open secret that the bosses of the trade exercised considerable influence in French politics, both national and municipal.<sup>1</sup> As an international business, the trade was organized according to the best capitalist models. Where industry organized men as instruments of production, the White-Slave trade organized women as instruments of pleasure. They are typical of the essential and fundamental evil of post-Renaissance civilization in its capitalist phase.

But post-Renaissance civilization is already in a stage of transition from its capitalist phase to the socialist, or State-capitalist phase. The outstanding fact about the new phase, which can be no longer open to reasonable doubt, is that the capitalist de-humanization of man is being taken a stage farther. It is being intensified and accelerated by the removal of traditional, Christian checks upon its progress. The mass-mentality with which the process has to contend has been de-immunized against its infection. A post-capitalist generation in Europe, at any rate, has come to maturity which has been moulded by ideas and values completely secularist—*i.e.*, ideas and values wholly consonant with a one-dimension order of life and the predominantly materialist character of the human being. In consequence, society is to that extent less able to resist the moral syphilis of totalitarian degradation.

In the stage of social development on which civilization is now entering, we shall see the secular faith in full maturity, having shaken itself free of the Christian tradition which, up to the present, has modified its effects and restricted its operations. Renaissance revolution has come to full term. There exists now a mentality, a general attitude, completely

<sup>1</sup> In Marseilles, *e.g.*

moulded by secular influences only, consciously untouched by the Christian outlook. Hitherto, that has not been the case. The secular faith has been restrained, like a bully who fights with only one arm. Now the other arm has been freed of the weight that imprisoned it. That is why capitalism has been a system within a larger system, from which streamed forth restraining influences. The economic slavery in capitalist operation was modified by the political liberty operating outside its sphere. But that condition is passing. We have yet to experience what the full-fledged belief in a humanity absolute and self-existent can make of man. So far we have seen only the faint outlines, and then only through a mist. But the mist is clearing. The hitherto faint outlines are becoming clearer and looming larger. The outlines are being filled in. We can see the process in operation in Soviet Russia, where Totalitarianism has proceeded farthest. Let us gaze at it for a moment, not through the rose-coloured spectacles of dupes, but with the naked eyes of those honestly desirous to know the truth. The de-humanization of man that we have so far observed in its initial phase can be noted, as it gathers momentum and weight. Not a pretty spectacle.

Readers who are old enough to remember "the ten days that shook the world"<sup>1</sup> in 1918 and in the few following years will be able to appreciate the great surge of hope and idealism that swept through the world. Here at last was a government of uncompromising idealists that meant business about the emancipation of the downtrodden, the establishment of genuine equality between man and man, and nation and nation, and the inauguration of real peace

<sup>1</sup> This was the title of a book about the Bolshevik Revolution by John Reed to which Lenin wrote a preface, warmly commending the book to working men everywhere. It is a book which the present regime in Russia takes the greatest care shall not be read by the workers of Russia, because it describes the very important rôle played by Trotsky in the seizure and maintenance of power by the Bolsheviks.

and international brotherhood. They may recall those grand decrees about similarity of pay between the workers on the bench and political commissars (*i.e.*, Cabinet Ministers). Here was a new era in history, when privilege was being swept away, wealth was to be shared, and economic slavery as well as political oppression was to be abolished. The heaven that Wordsworth felt in his heart in the dawn of the French Revolution was but a pale reflection of the super-Heaven which so many people felt in the dawn of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918. There were the marvellous stories of Lenin and his colleagues helping to unload timber on Saturday afternoons; of the Bolshevik commissars nobly handing over to hospitals the butter and cheese sent to them by admirers on country farms, their equal sharing of cold and discomfort. Who to-day would recognize in the gold-braided, decorations-besplashed Molotov the eager young Bolshevik who moved in 1922 that "Communist employees whose monthly earnings are above the scales set for the 17th category, must contribute from one quarter to one half of the surplus to a relief fund. Communists receiving above set scales are obliged to contribute to the fund the entire amount above the set scale"? Who would have been so blasphemous as to suggest then that that noble, slim young crusader for human equality would ever evolve into the corpulent consumer of privileges of 1946; the diplomatic defender of the greatest tyranny the world has ever known, and who doesn't dare to move in public without a bodyguard? Such things were inconceivable then; for there was the feeling that the millennium itself was about to begin. "The reign of equality, of justice, and happiness for all had arrived. The selfishness of the landlords and capitalists stood in the way of the coming of the millennium. It was necessary, therefore, to destroy them, and no sacrifices were



too great. Every sacrifice was considered justified, and every cruelty, however great, was believed endowed with high human purpose.”<sup>1</sup> This was the mood, the hope and the faith that possessed the hearts of millions in 1918 and for many subsequent years. It was the hope of a new liberty for man. Has the hope been fulfilled?

No good purpose whatever can be any longer served by obscuring the terrible truth about Soviet Russia. It is a vast slave camp, in which the human spirit is undergoing a degradation which has never been hitherto conceived to be possible. It is a land in which *capital* wealth (but not consumer wealth) has accumulated and men have decayed. It is a land from which even the memory of the most elementary Western notions of liberty has been wellnigh blotted out. It is a land in which not a single human right can be enjoyed except at the pleasure of an irresponsible dictatorship, which Trotsky (himself as great a dictator as any) perfectly described as early as 1904. “In Lenin’s scheme (for the organization of the party), the party takes the place of the working class. The party organization displaces the party. The Central Committee displaces the party organization, and finally the Dictator displaces the Central Committee.” It is a land in which men, women and children have been reduced to a greater degree of sheer instrumentalization than anything history can record. The chattel slavery of ancient Athens or Rome was a paradise compared to what millions have to endure in the Soviet hell. Readers may naturally think that this is a piece of literary licence. Let us then consider a concrete, literal example.

It is agreed on every hand that concentration camps exist in Russia. That fact cannot be dismissed as the slanderous

<sup>1</sup> P. 90, *The Real Soviet Russia*, by David J. Dallin (Yale University Press, 1944). I must express my great indebtedness to this study of Soviet Russia. Why is it that a book of such importance has not been published in England?

invention of "Fascist beasts" or "bourgeois swine". They have been seen by too many eye-witnesses to be any longer denied, in spite of the iron censorship and the colossal mechanism of deception wielded by the Soviet dictatorship. The questions in dispute are the number of these slave-compounds, the number of their human victims and the aim and nature of the camps themselves. At one extreme, in the imagination of completely uncritical worshippers of everything Russian, the concentration camps are centres of re-education for the "redemption" of criminals and "mistaken" political opponents. At the other extreme, they are regarded as instruments of the most wicked, unlimited exploitation and inhumanity, especially are they so regarded by the few who have succeeded in escaping from them. Of course, they are prejudiced witnesses! But in spite of that, contrary to the usual estimate, the truth lies, in this instance, not between the two extremes, but at the outer end of one of them—the worse one. By way of approach to the problem, may I quote a few passages from recent visitors to Russia?

The late Wendell Willkie, describing his visit in 1943, wrote: "We drove into Yakutsk in a heavy black Soviet limousine. Between the airfield and the town we looked for *the usual concentration camp we have seen in some other cities.*" (My italics.) For once, he failed to see one. Let the reader note well the point that it was an exception.<sup>1</sup>

In *Blind Date With Mars*, Alice Moats reports what a Soviet citizen told her: "Do you realize that as the result of the great purge, there is not one person in this country who has not either been locked up himself or has had some member of his family in a concentration camp?" (Note—"not one" not directly or indirectly affected out of a popula-

<sup>1</sup> The above passages are quoted by David J. Dallin in *The Real Soviet Russia*, pp. 187-8.

tion of 180,000,000!) "Right now there are some fifteen million people in work-camps and prisons. Later a person in a position to obtain accurate figures set the number at twenty millions."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Philip Jordan, once of the *News-Chronicle*, who cannot be accused of anti-Soviet prejudice, wrote the following description in his book *Russian Glory*: "It was at Ryazan that we saw something which, had I seen it at home, would have filled me with indignation and disgust, but which, because its victims seemed not to care or object, was no concern of mine. Standing beside our train was a long line of flat cars intercepted here and there by barren prison vans. On the flat track opposite our window were perhaps thirty women guarded by an NKVD man with a tommy-gun. They were squatting like dummies there, and had not moved for hours, for against their exposed flanks the first snows of winter had driven, and there they now rested. . . . There was something terrible about them. They looked like the last inhabitants of a world they could remember to have once been populated by a race of happy men who existed no longer."<sup>1</sup>

From such reports (of which the foregoing are but fractional examples) there emerges the fact of the existence of inhuman places of confinement on a vast scale. How vast it is impossible to say accurately, because the Soviet Government guards its secret so jealously, even refusing to participate in the work of any international organization, such as the Red Cross, which necessitates the admission into Russia of any independent investigators. Estimates vary between 20,000,000 and 11,000,000. From a report (not yet published) of an inmate of one of the camps, I extract the following statement—"Soviet officials contradicted

<sup>1</sup> The above passages are quoted by David J. Dallin in *The Real Soviet Russia*, pp. 187-8.

sharply the statement that the figure (of prisoners) was above twenty million, but they did not object to a figure within the limit of twenty million." The *Nineteenth Century* in 1944 put the figure at 18,000,000. Whatever the figure—twenty, eighteen, fifteen or eleven millions—here is a vast human community enduring absolute slavery under a regime that came into power to emancipate men from a form of slavery much milder and far more humane.

Dallin, the American authority, gives a list, *which is far from complete*, of several hundred camps scattered throughout the various European and Asiatic provinces of Soviet Russia.<sup>1</sup> In them are herded millions of men and women who are used as slave-gangs on work of national development. In the twenty-six years of its existence, the Soviet regime has created an army of anything from twelve to twenty million slaves—and keeps on replenishing it, as its members die off, which they do very rapidly. Three to five years is the length of life in the slave camps, passing away like weeds, "their heritage a sunless day". "At any rate, whatever the actual number of workers under the forced-labour system may be, it is equivalent to the population of a country like Yugoslavia, or Czechoslovakia, or the Argentine, and it is certainly not less than the population of Australia. The number of people subject to forced labour is not less and is probably greater than the total number of industrial workers at liberty in Russia."<sup>2</sup>

This vast cruelty is organized by the Russian secret police system, the NKVD, which is a Gestapo on a gigantic scale, in comparison with which the Nazi Gestapo was a puny affair. The NKVD is unique in the history of police systems. *It controls the State*. It is the biggest employer in the world, with powers which must make the un-

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 203-5, *The Real Soviet Russia*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

regenerate capitalist of the West sick with envy. It has no trade-union to contend with. It pays out only bare sustenance and works its slaves day and night, till they drop into merciful death. It recruits its employee armies by terrorizing the entire population of Russia. It rests upon "inhumanity, slavery, abomination and death" (Dallin).

This concentration-camp system, with its unparalleled army of slave-labour,<sup>1</sup> is only one aspect of the degradation of man into which the full secularization of post-Renaissance civilization has descended in Russia, Marxist Russia. It is the worst aspect, the most foul, the most abominable, the most iniquitous, but still only one. Its corrosion of the precious mind and spirit of the human individual is altogether beyond the comprehension of those who haven't had to live under it. Here, for instance, is the testimony of Mr. Arthur Koestler, who has felt its horror in his own flesh and spirit. "The tragedy is that only those realize what oxygen means who have known the torture of suffocation; only those who have shared the life of the ordinary native in Nazi Germany or Stalinite Russia for at least a year know that disintegration of the human substance which befalls people deprived of basic liberties. . . . The English public, disgruntled but secure within the law, does not know the shivering insecurity, the naked horror of an autocratic police-state."<sup>2</sup> Marxism, said Lenin, was the ripe and rich fulfilment of modern European culture. Under the domination of this "ripe culture" in Soviet Russia, man has been corrupted and degraded into a piece of biological and economic raw material! Here, to give one more instance, is a descriptive judgement of a recent visitor to Russia who had the most exceptional opportunities to

<sup>1</sup> Only the slave-labour that went to the building of the Pyramids and the serf-labour employed by Peter in the building of St. Petersburg can remotely compare with it.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *The Yogi and the Commissar* (Jonathan Cape, 1945), p. 218.

travel through the country: ". . . it is necessary to know the meaning of the term 'social-engineering', as first coined and later practised by the Communist Party. . . . It is also an axiom of social engineering to separate families, not as an act of needless cruelty, but because men are suited for stronger, more rugged work than are their wives and daughters, so heads of families are sent to special camps. But if they are told this at the outset, the emotional scenes which follow cause needless delay. Consequently, the only instruction given by the NKVD in the home is that the head of the family is to pack his toilet articles separately, since men will go to another place for sanitary inspection. Therefore, not until the family is on the station platform do they discover that the head of the family is locked with other men in a car separate from those into which they are locked with women and children. It may be several days before they learn that the men are now en route to an unknown labour camp. It was the practice to send men to lumber and mining camps in northern Siberia, while women and children did better in the brick-yards and co-operative farms in southern Kagakstan."<sup>1</sup> As Mr. White so dispassionately puts it, no deliberate cruelty is intended in breaking up families. After all, it is absurd to argue that it is cruel to peel a potato. Cruelty is something which one can inflict only on human beings or animals. Once you reach the point of reducing men and women and children to the status of instrument, the concept of cruelty vanishes.

In Stalin and the handful of men wielding power in Russia, the concept of an absolute humanity, of man deified, labours under no inhibition whatsoever. In the result, their ideals and aims and purposes, be they never so idealistic, work out at last into utter inhumanity and

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 113-14, *Report on the Russians*, by W. L. White (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1945).

corruption. However good the intention, nothing can prevent the deification of man turning into power devoid of the element of conscience. Morality degenerates into an instrument of non-moral power. This is exactly what has happened in Russia and is in rapid process of happening wherever the writ of Moscow runs. The mass, fooled and deluded, becomes the instrument of conscienceless power. Mr. David J. Dallin, to quote him once more, has translated this essentially theological fact into prosaic political terms. "This extraordinary historical phenomenon of the creation of a great social class by the methods of exile, imprisonment, and compulsion has had its ideological inception in high principles of humanity and love of one's neighbour. Faith in labor, in the enlightening effect of labor, in the correction of the human being through labor, in treatment of criminals by the therapeutic use of labor, the appeal of the all-embracing poetry of labor, gave rise to concepts in Soviet Russia which ultimately found expression in hard and bitter experience. One can think of no greater paradox than this transformation of the most advanced ideas of the science and morals of recent centuries into a cruel system of compulsory labor for millions. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

If ever the connection between theological dogma and moral ideals and institutions was laid bare, it is most surely in the mounting tragedy of the last twenty-five years of European history. Soviet Russia has made the term Communism and, to a degree slightly less, the term Socialism utterly putrid. Marxism stinks in the nostrils of history. From its materialist assumptions about history and man, it has rotted and festered into a bloody tyranny, into a cynical a-moralism, into the corruption of conscience. That's what happens when man becomes god : he becomes

<sup>1</sup> Dallin, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80.

a monster. "When the gods depart," said a modern German poet, "the demons arrive". Don't we know it!

Western civilization has reached the apogee of its materialism, which leaves open only one prospect: rapidly accumulating contradictions and conflicts and accelerating disintegration. On the basis of materialism, the re-integration of civilized society is utterly impossible. Re-integration is conditional upon an inner, spiritual change. Just as post-medieval Renaissance witnessed an inner, spiritual change—a change very much for the worse, as we have seen—which reflected itself in changed values, ideas, atmosphere and institutions, so post-Renaissance, contemporary civilization must end in inner spiritual change, if it is to enter upon a new, relatively stable era. Inner change can alone promise a new integration. The perpetuation of existing values and objectives will inevitably bring our Western world to a Gadarene descent, which, New Testament readers may recall, got steeper and steeper in the final stage. *Western civilization must repent its titanic, basic sin.*

We may vary the statement of the problem by saying that Western man must acquire new social, economic and political values. Contemporary theological analysis of our world has transformed this statement into a *cliché*, which, however, lessens neither its truth nor its urgency. A crusade for new values is the need of the hour. Yes! But how? We cannot manufacture new values, as I hope to show. Values are a by-product—of dogma and faith. The necessity pressing upon our society is for nothing less than a recovery of Christian dogma and attitude towards life and the world. This is the problem that must occupy our serious attention in the next and final chapter. Western man must repent. The first element in repentance now is theological *in fact*, whatever name be given to it.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE RECOVERY OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

WE concluded our last chapter by saying, among other things, that it is not within human power to manufacture new values. Values are consequent upon dogma, upon a faith, upon a prior, pre-rational ideal or affirmation to which men commit themselves without reserve, absolutely. Values emerge involuntarily from the assent that engages the whole being of man. They are pre-determined for us by that to which we say our yea or nay with our entire self. This is a fact of cardinal importance.

A fundamental illusion, which seems to be common to all the secular sociologies, is the assumption that the creating or changing of social values is a self-contained process, quite dissociated from prior belief or doctrine. It is an illusion entertained even by those who are pleading for the recovery of Christian ethical principles whilst rejecting Christian dogmas and doctrines, like Mr. Lewis Mumford and Mr. Arthur Koestler, who may be described as sociologists of the half-way house. They seem to assume that the *ad hoc* creation of values is a human possibility. Prof. Michael Polyani also seems to stop half-way.<sup>1</sup> The social prophets of the half-way house are urging a return to values which grew out of faith in a revelation, about which, however, they are either silent or more or less faintly hostile. They are, in my honest judgment, labouring under the delusion that the social values for whose recovery they are so sincerely and finely pleading can be detached from

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Listener* for April 24th, 1946, for a report of his otherwise excellent broadcast in the series, "The Challenge of Our Time".

the beliefs in which they are so securely rooted, theologically as well as historically. This seems to me a perverse attitude in face of the situation of civilization to-day, in which the dissolution of Christian beliefs has been followed by a dissolution of Christian values also. This is like believing that roses have a life of their own independent of the tree from which they have been cut; that the bloom they enjoy on the tree can be transferred in perpetuity to the rose-bowl on the dining-table. The sociologists of the half-way house seem to think that the temporary shelter in which they have found refuge can be made into a permanent home. They apparently take for granted that it is within modern man's capacity to erect what is, in effect, a Christian civilization on a basis of secular belief. There is no realization of the vital, organic relation between Christian values and Christian doctrine; that social ideals and principles are derivatory, and not fontal and primary. The pursuit of Christian social values, dissociated from the theology out of which they derive their existence and nourishment, is a pursuit of phantoms; a foredoomed attempt to isolate the shadows from the sun.

My confidence in the soundness of this conclusion is considerably fortified by a recent work of Mr. C. S. Lewis's entitled *The Abolition of Man*, from which I quote: "This thing which I have called for convenience the *Tao*, and which others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes, is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value-judgments. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. . . . What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) 'Ideologies', all consist of fragments from the *Tao* itself, arbitrarily wrenched from

their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the *Tao* and to it alone such validity as they possess. If my duty to my parents is a superstition, then so is my duty to posterity. If justice is a superstition, then is my duty to my country or my race. If the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a real value, then so is conjugal fidelity. The rebellion of new ideologies against the *Tao* is a rebellion of the branches against the tree; if the rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves. The human mind has no more power of creating a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun or a new sky for it to move in."

Now, if instead of the word *Tao* we read the word *Revelation*, the significance of this becomes clearer. Christian faith is the revelation in Christ of what God is in His own being, character and relation to mankind. Christian social values are the reflection of that revelation in human relations and social institutions. Dogma affirms that which is. It formulates intellectually what is believed about the nature of absolute transcendent reality. It is exactly such belief which determines what our social values will be. Values are not a casual creation of the human mind, to be adopted in accordance with what we may happen to think good or desirable. What we think good and desirable is governed and decided by our values; and our values, which determine the character of civilization, issue forth from our belief about Reality, or God. Changes of social values, therefore, cannot be brought about simply on the historic level or on the level merely of reason and organization. The source of the process of change in values lies in what we believe about God, not just as an opinion formed rationally, but as something more in the nature of a pre-rational acceptance. The Christian revelation, or Word, of God confronts man

with a demand for a Yea or a Nay. It presents itself to man as something to be accepted or rejected : not as something to be logically investigated, tested, weighed in terms of pros and cons and finally adjudicated. We either accept what Christ manifests of God or we don't. Reason is incapable of deciding the truth or falsity of that manifestation in the first place. The values determining the social process are an involuntary consequence of our initial acceptance or rejection of Christ's Word about God. Theology precedes and determines sociology. Theology affirms elemental being. Sociology affirms being, too, but a derived being.

I realize fully, of course, how this analysis of social values and their relation to belief will be dismissed as an attack upon reason. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. It is a rehabilitation of reason by assigning it its true place and function. It is rationalism that has really made the attack on reason by inflating its pretensions, and by erasing the distinction between reason as an instrumental function of the being of man, and reason as the supreme arbiter of basic being and of elemental reality. Christianity, of course, does involve a complete and emphatic denial of reason as absolute. It does uncompromisingly attack reason inflated with the pride of its own omnipotence. When reason claims, for instance, to be able to decide the question of the very existence of God, it is in fact laying claim to omnipotence. It is affirming its own deity. This is what Christian theology absolutely denies : reason is incompetent to decide the verity, the prior, timeless verity, of revelation. Theology spurns, not the exercise of reason as a function, but its pretensions to supremacy.

The claims of reason to adjudicate on revelation fail to substantiate themselves even in the field of purely secular experience. Here again, Mr. C. S. Lewis makes this point

with conclusive force. By claiming to go beyond "first principles", knowledge itself ceases to be possible. By carrying rationalism to the *n*th degree, the world is reduced to irrationality. If reason is to be reliable as an instrument of experience, there must be a point at which it stops. If it goes beyond that point—first principles, postulates, axioms or what you will—even the possibility of reason vanishes. In Mr. Lewis' words, by "seeing through" everything, it finally sees nothing. ". . . extreme rationalism, by 'seeing through' all 'rational' motives, leaves them creatures of wholly irrational behaviour . . . you cannot go on 'explaining away' for ever: you will find that you have explained 'explanation' itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to 'see through' first principles."<sup>1</sup> What therefore divides the Christian theologian from the secular philosopher is not whether revelation is or is not subordinate to reason, but whether there shall exist an area of reality immune to the corrosive of reason; whether there is a body of primary meaning to which reason itself must always be subordinate.

Hence the struggle over social values (and also over personal values) is most emphatically and directly a theological struggle, since it is the ultimate realm of human thinking and being that decides all the concrete, practical questions that call for solution in the social sphere. Contemporary experience ought to be decisive on the question of theology and ethics, and should at least spare us any further instalments of the dreary serial of the independence of social principles. Mr. Joad, it seems, has been convinced of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Abolition of Man*, pp. 33-40.

utter falsity of this view. "It was the values, as I now see in retrospect, that caused me to take my first downward step on the slippery slope that leads to Heaven. For presently the notion of a number of absolute values—three, perhaps, or four, twelve or twenty, but in any event an arbitrary number, pieces of cosmic furniture just floating about, as it were, without visible means of support—came to seem to me, in the highest degree, unplausible. . . . Yet there must, I now thought, be some sort of unity in the universe to whose existence they bore witness, as its revealed aspects. Once the need for a unity of values or a unity behind values was admitted, it could be most plausibly represented as the unity of a person. Thus I was led to postulate the familiar theistic position, and came to regard the values as modes of God's expression, aspects under which He revealed Himself to man."<sup>1</sup>

The rescue of Western civilization, then, would seem to demand nothing less than the restoration of Christian dogma and belief to a position of dominance in the minds of the present generation, a restoration of the position once occupied by Christian dogma in European civilization. Stated in this fashion without any adornment or obscurity (since adornment can obscure), it would certainly appear as though one were asking for the impossible. At the moment

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Rationalist Press Annual*, 1946, p. 72. Mr. Joak contributed to this publication a highly stimulating and sincere article entitled, "On Being no Longer a Rationalist", from which the above extract is taken.

Alexander Herzen, in his *Memoirs* (six volumes, published by Chatto & Windus), furnishes a striking example of the intimate relation between theological belief and social institutions. Writing about the decline of serfdom in Russia in the early nineteenth century, Herzen says: "In those days there used to be a patriarchal dynastic affection between landowners and their serfs, such as exists even now in Turkey. To-day there are in Russia no more of those devoted servants, attached to the race and family of their masters. And that is easy to understand. *The landowner no longer believes in his power, he does not believe that he will have to answer for his serfs at the terrible Day of Judgment, but simply makes use of his power for his own advantage.*" (My italics, D.R.D.) Vide *Memoirs*, Vol. I, p. 34.

nothing seems to be so wildly or utterly remote from realization as a recovery by Christian dogma of a commanding influence over the mind of our time. One thinks, for instance, of that cast-iron, billiard-table type of Marxist mind, with its contempt for anything spiritual, with its complacent cocksureness of its own infallibility. For that type of mind to become submissive to the Christian faith would seem like expecting miracles.

But miracles happen, even if they are mostly evil. With the exception of a handful of men of profound prophetic insight, who would have ventured to think fifty years ago that the most civilized, scientific and highly technological nation in Europe would be governed by an untutored, uncultured fanatic, by ideas and principles which the world had taken for granted had vanished for ever? But it happened! Who would have dared to suggest a revival of religious persecution, not by the Churches, but by secularists and humanitarians with all the right ideas? But that also has come to pass.<sup>1</sup> Improbability of achievement is by no means a conclusive guarantee against the eventuation of a situation—not even against the possibility of a dynamic re-appropriation of Christian dogma by our generation. It is fantastically remote and improbable. We won't waste precious paper in trying to demonstrate it. But the very improbability of it may be a sore temptation to the ironic spirit which seems to possess history in these days. If I were rationalist, which mercifully I am not, but if I were, I wouldn't crow too soon! After what Europe has witnessed in the way of the realization of the super-

<sup>1</sup> The Churches of nearly half Europe are being persecuted to-day in varying degrees and forms of cruelty. As in every other attack upon the standards and achievements of European culture and civilization, Soviet Russia is acting as leader and pacemaker. For the moment, Stalin is tolerating the Church in Russia so long as it lends itself to the promotion of Soviet foreign policy. The Church in Russia is proving to be a far superior political instrument to the Comintern.

fantastic, even the emergence of Christian dogma into a position of authority (intellectual) is not to be excluded.

Civilization is undergoing a grim and baleful process, which will become still more grim and baleful. Situations will eventuate that will test men's souls to the uttermost. It is not at all fantastic to imagine, in face of the sinister potentialities of our time (those of atomic power, for example), that the whole Christian faith and attitude may suddenly come to seem tragically relevant, not by a nice, dignified, civilized process of ratiocination and leisured brain-trusting; but by the cruel pressure of a new barbaric upheaval, resulting in collapsing traditions and sanctities. "And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us and hide us. . . ." (Rev. 6. vv. 14-16). A situation in which men and women will despairingly look to rocks for mercy and protection will be a situation of immense possibilities! One of which may well be a swift and super-rational realization of the terrible RELEVANCE of Christianity to the defenceless, disintegrated soul of man. So cheer up! The trump card is in the hands of Divine Providence.

Meanwhile, it may be useful to examine the relevance of Christianity to the situation of collapsing secular civilization. It may act as a preparatory, pre-disposing discipline.

Many years ago, Mr. R. H. Tawney coined that striking phrase, "the sickness of acquisitive society", by which he meant Western European civilization, together with its Atlantic extension in the United States. At the time Mr. Tawney wrote his book of that title, there were many



people, both of Christian and secular persuasions, who were far from being convinced of the truth of his diagnosis. But if the twenty-five years that have elapsed since have done nothing else (which they most assuredly have), they have at any rate shattered the easy-going assumption of the essential soundness of Western society. A world in which have been perpetrated the nameless horrors of the last twenty years is not a world concerning which any serious-minded thinker can delude himself any longer. The sickness of Western society is no longer open to reasonable doubt. The belief that it is a diseased society is one to which an out-and-out secularist like Prof. Laski, *e.g.*, and an out-and-out theologian, like Karl Barth, can both subscribe.

Now, this consensus of opinion about the condition of society, though certainly an achievement when we recall the Utopianism of only a generation ago, does not take us much farther forward. When all is said and done, it represents no more than a conviction about an external institution. This still leaves us with the vast and profound problem of the root of the sickness. On this question there is a radical divergence of opinion and belief. The dominating philosophies and attitudes of modern thought contend that the sickness of our civilization is nothing more than a maladjustment between the structure of society and its technical resources and capacities. For all essential purposes, it is due to the failure of civilization to adapt its institutions and relations to the revolution brought about by scientific progress, the central feature of which is the substitution of human labour power by material forces harnessed to the machine. Our social institutions are not "geared", as the Americans say, to the era of machine-power. They embody a condition of limited human labour-power. The inevitable contradiction between the

productive forces and the outworn social structure breeds sickness and decay throughout the whole of social life—in its politics, culture and religion. There ensues a paralysis of will, a profound and persistent frustration of all creative impulse. Hence our wars, our poverty, our apathy, our futility and so on *ad nauseam*.

Now, if this analysis of our social ills is correct, then, alarming though our situation may be, it is not *serious*. Most certainly it is not fatal. It indicates nothing which is beyond the curative power of human wisdom, common sense and—let us say—a dash of goodwill. These can all be supplied, surely, by a thoroughgoing reform in education aiming at creating citizens for a new world. So, fundamentally, the dominant thought of our time, as expressed in this analysis, is still optimistic. With the grim object-lesson of doodle-bugs, rockets and atomic bombs, our society will be stimulated to the long-overdue task of adapting social institutions to the new technological resources released by science. Essentially, it calls for nothing more than a willingness to learn from experience and to act accordingly.

It is surely difficult to understand why an analysis of social crisis which goes as deep as the one briefly sketched here should not go deeper still. If the conclusion at which we arrive calls for nothing greater than "willingness to learn from experience and to act accordingly", why doesn't it give rise to reflection on a fact which ought to be fairly obvious to social observers and historical students—namely, the extreme reluctance which mankind seems to display in doing what now is apparently called for, to wit, learning from experience? One of the outstanding facts both of history and experience (*i.e.*, contemporary history) is precisely the unwillingness of men to learn from experience, if we may infer unwillingness from the fact that they don't.

Fools, we are told, only learn from experience. On the contrary, it is fools who don't learn. The man who learns from experience in such a way as to transform his behaviour is a wise man—and he is rare. This essentially optimistic analysis of our contemporary distress concludes by demanding a will, an attitude which, in fact, history proves to be most unusual and difficult. If the past is much to go by, the optimism of the above analysis is not well-founded. It is asking for something which mankind, on the whole, has conspicuously failed to exhibit in the past.

Now, it is exactly at this point that Christian faith will be seen to be relevant to our situation, into which it penetrates more deeply than any merely secular analysis (whether Liberal or Marxist). The secular analysis is, in fact, so obsessed with the exterior social maladjustment, with the contradiction between the technical actualities and the outmoded social structure, that it is not driven to the further and really more urgent problem: *why the maladjustment?* That is much the more fundamental problem. Why do men cling to outworn social institutions when their consequences are so obviously and thoroughly evil and *disadvantageous*? A popular—and shallow—answer to this question is that it is because men are stupid or lethargic or ignorant. The reason, that is to say, is that men are insufficiently rational. Men are rational, but not yet rational enough. This situation can be cured by a process of rational education. The problem is envisaged in purely ratiocinative terms.

This answer fails to do justice both to elementary experience and to the modern psychology of the unconscious. One of the most common facts of daily experience is that men persist in wrong and foolish and anti-social conduct, not because of inadequate rationality, of lack of knowledge or understanding. They embark on conduct which they

know, with crystal clarity, will be disastrous. Why do they do so? To say that if they only had still more knowledge, they would refrain from such conduct is riding theory against plain fact. Anti-social conduct is not the monopoly of the ignorant or uneducated. It is characteristic of both the learned and unlearned, the ignorant and the educated. In fact, the ratiocinative factor does not touch this problem. It is indicative of something which lies altogether outside the realm of the rational. It is precisely about this that Christian faith has something to say. It speaks to a problem whose significance and dimensions have not yet been sufficiently appreciated by any secular sociology. Christian faith is at home, so to say, with human tragedy, disaster, suffering and frustration. All this, the accumulated calamity of history, is Christianity's native heath. It is familiar ground, as any attentive reader of the Bible thoroughly understands.

When Christian theology addresses itself to history, to social institutions, it inevitably becomes sociological. At least, it speaks with a strong sociological accent. Indeed, if sociology could be called a science at all, it would be *par excellence* the Christian science. The Christian Faith, in its very essence, regards mankind as a social, organic entity, and not as a mere aggregate of individuals. Historic achievement is only now beginning to catch up with original, Christian affirmations about the unitary, organic character of mankind as one. And so on. The idea that individuals are self-existent, and that society is the sum total of self-existent individuals is an aberration of essential Christian thinking—an aberration, by the way, which was pioneered by political theory in the hands of John Locke. It is to society that Christianity is supremely relevant, in its analysis, in its ethic and in its theology. A debased Christian orthodoxy, following in the wake of a debased

humanist theory, transformed the Christian doctrine of cosmic, racial salvation into individual salvation, thereby reflecting capitalist economics in Christian theology. But this was a violent departure—and a temporary one—from the stream of Christian tradition which has unvaryingly thought of the whole human race as a unity.

Christian theology, then, is by definition, sociological. That is why the present situation of Western civilization is such a profound, Christian concern. That is why, also, the essentially optimistic, secular analysis of contemporary society is one of which Christianity is bound to be critical. It is not sociological enough. It is a mere dialectical reaction to the anti-sociological idea of mankind as an aggregate of individuals. But exactly because it is a mere reaction, it violates the Christian paradox of society. This paradox is a tension of contradictory opposites, both of which are persistently maintained. Society, says Christianity, is a unity composed of independent unities—individual persons. The Christian analysis of our society proceeds from a vaster, more comprehensive dimension. It is this characteristic of the Christian view of society which enables the Christian Faith to see through the inadequacy of the prevailing secular analysis of "our present discontents", its fatal miscalculation about the moral and rational capacity of human nature.

The secular analysis of the ills of civilization, which I have already outlined, and the remedy consequent upon that analysis, boil down at last to a common-sense obedience to good advice. What society needs is right ideas, common-sense and determination to act upon those ideas. But in all its troubled history, mankind has never lacked abundance of good idea, which, however, it has perversely refused to apply. Why, therefore, should we assume that mankind will suddenly become enlightened now? As Mr. C. S.

Lewis pertinently puts it: "There has been no lack of good ideas for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference."<sup>1</sup> The threat of disaster has obviously failed to act as a deterrent upon stupid or evil conduct, especially in societies. From 1919 to the outbreak of war, Europe was sufficiently warned of the dreadful consequences of another war. The failure to heed those warnings is clear proof that there is some dreadful perversity, some terrible impotence, in the human will. It is clear proof that the trouble lies much deeper than is realized by the best secular humanism, because it does concern itself with the deeper effective causes of the failure of Western civilization. Secular humanism *irrationally* persists in ignoring that deeper level of causation, because its recognition and the admission of its truth would make its own position completely untenable. It would necessitate the bitter realization that, for the last four hundred years, secular humanism has been leading Europe astray. And in this the pride of Western man is at stake.

The Christian analysis of the state of society to-day begins with the fact of universal individual egocentricity, that every "baby born alive" is self-centred, that every individual person experiences the universe, judges, thinks, feels and acts in relation to himself *as centre*. The fact, of course, is familiar. But the significance of the fact for civilization and for history, which Christianity senses, is anything but familiar. Modern secular thought looks upon this universal egocentricity as *normal and natural*. It assumes, without the slightest warrant—indeed in the teeth of evidence—that, like everything else human, it is subject to a process of evolution, in the course of which it changes into something different, into something not self-centred; that in this evolution it is proceeding towards

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Beyond Personality*, p. 11 (Geoffrey Bles, 1944).

vanishing point. Hence, in the twentieth century, individuals are somehow less egocentric than in the first century, and in the fortieth century, the coming of which is blissfully assumed, individuals will be still less egocentric. "Time, gentlemen," in secular thinking about human nature, is transformed into a grandiose slogan of historic human destiny.

*This is the fatal, deadly miscalculation about human nature.* It is the root of the modern illusion about the achievements of man in civilization. It is also the source of the blindness of the modern mind, not simply to the truth of Christianity, but to its meaning, to its doctrinal formulation in the current situation. From this initial assumption about the "evolvability" of egocentric human nature stems the whole error of secular humanism. Christianity envisages egocentricity in an entirely different setting, and perceives in it a profoundly different significance, which is decisive for the whole future of the human race.

The first assertion Christianity makes about the self-centredness of human nature is that it is *abnormal*; that it is a perversion of human nature from its pristine form. Human nature, as we know it in history, is not human nature as it was first created by God. Man, as created by God, was God-centred. Man, as re-created by himself, is self-centred. Historic man is "man in revolt" against his original creation. It is from this revolt of man against God that the whole tragedy and evil of history arise. It is something which proceeds from the deep irrational will of man. Egoism cannot be anything but irrational, since it is committed to an impossibility. It is trying to create a harmony out of persistent conflict. The basic characteristic of egoism is will-to-power. What is will-to-power seeking to achieve? It is seeking to impose itself on everybody else; to subordinate everybody to itself. How can

you create a harmonious society in which the basic impulse of the individuals composing society is to subject other persons to themselves? The thing is utterly impossible. It is abnormal, unnatural and anti-cosmic. *Within the condition of self-centredness, the historic problem is insoluble.* This is the fundamental assertion of Christianity about historic humanity, about man as he appears in history. The insolubility of the human problem in terms of self-will is indicated by two facts.

There is, first of all, the fact that history presents the same problem in successively different forms. Behind the numerous and complex institutional changes of history, there lies essentially the same unvarying problem. Let me give one or two examples. Behind all the structural social changes from chattel-slavery in the ancient world to the wage-relation in the modern capitalist world, there is the permanent injustice of the exploitation of man by man. Social change has not affected the *substance* of exploitation. It has varied the *form* of the exploitation. It has modified its exercise and restrained some of its worst excesses, though a strong case could be made for the thesis that chattel-slavery was humanly better than some phases of the capitalist exploitation of primitive peoples or the Communist exploitation of the masses. But the most that can be said to have come out of the structural changes in society—and it is a great deal—is that they have increased the power of the exploited to resist the exploiter, except, significantly, under totalitarian regimes. *But they have not done away with exploitation.* The evil persists in a different form. It still persists in the post-capitalist form in Russia, as has already been shown. The alleged modification of the economic exploitation of man in Soviet Russia is anyhow neutralized by the much more intense social exploitation of man in that one-party State. One possible answer to this fact is that,



now that the war has been won, social oppression in Russia will be lifted. That is, Utopia is round the next corner, which is wish-thinking, not science. Moreover, there is nothing novel about this wish-thinking. It is the hoariest delusion in all human history. Utopia always has been round the next corner. Meanwhile the fact to which we have to accommodate our thinking is that social evolution has not abolished the exploitation of man by man, or even touched it *fundamentally*.

Modern psychology considerably reinforces the Christian doctrine of human nature on this point, in that it has disclosed the vastly increased range and depth of human exploitation. Marxism has tended to encourage the fallacy that exploitation is basically economic and that other social forms of exploitation are mere by-products of the economic. Abolish the economic exploitation, and the other forms will automatically vanish. *O sancta simplicitas!* The psycho-analytic discovery of the mechanism of rationalization conclusively demonstrates that exploitation of man by man is rooted in the abysmal unconscious being of man, and that it insinuates itself into all human relationships, personal as well as social. So beyond the arena of social exploitation in its various forms, modern psychology has opened up a new vista of the evil of exploitation to which social action is simply irrelevant.

The other fact which indicates the insolubility of the human problem is the persistent inability of societies of radically different cultures to unite even for self-preservation. The failure of the Greek city-states to unite in face of the Macedonian peril cost them their independent existence. In terms of relation between peoples and nations, this problem crystallizes down to the failure to abolish war, which would seem to indicate that the above statement is an under-statement. Not only have culturally different socie-

ties proved incapable of union, but societies of the same or very similar culture have proved likewise incapable. Hence the permanence of war as an institution. The modern increase in technical progress, educational extension, and in democratic liberties, so far from abolishing war, have actually increased it and intensified it. The modern wars of peoples are both more numerous and more destructive than the medieval wars of dynasties. To this the answer again may be that the late war is the last—which we all devoutly hope to be the case. But this is nothing more than a hope, well or ill-founded. It is not a certainty. What is certain is—but hardly anywhere realized—that the future maintenance of world peace will demand sustained moral effort exceeding, in concentration, the physical effort of the war years to achieve victory. Is such an effort to be lightly assumed?

Now, these two facts indicate a condition or state of human nature to which the Christian doctrine of man as a being in need of redemption is more adequate than any of the variant optimism of secular sociology. The Christian doctrine of Original Sin is much nearer to a scientific description of human nature than any contemporary secular philosophy. It does cover the basic fact in the history of society, that whilst *the forms* which embody the self-centred will of man do certainly undergo evolution, *the will itself* persists as a self-centred dynamic, which inevitably involves the whole historic development of civilization in a process of frustration and destruction. If thinkers who to-day pride themselves on being scientific were only a bit more scientific than they think they are, they would be more objective in their consideration of the Christian doctrine of man. The fact of the matter, however, is that the purely secularist thinker to-day, especially the so-called progressive thinker, has made up his mind that

Christian doctrine *cannot* be true. And that prevents him doing justice to the facts. I contend that it is secular prejudice which accounts for the failure of modern secular thought to appreciate, at least, the relevance of Christian dogma.

If, then, the egocentricity of the human will remains unaffected by social development—and this is the sociological significance of the Christian doctrine of Original Sin—the conclusion is inevitable: the future development of man can never escape the element of self-destruction and frustration. Increased mastery over nature will merely result in the intensification of the process of self-destruction, which is exactly the position of contemporary Western civilization. Creative technical progress enlarges the stage of destruction. This constitutes a fate, a doom for humanity. Hence, if the human race is to escape from this fate, it can only do so by the agency of some power outside itself. That is to say, man is a creature in need of redemption. This is precisely the meaning of the entire system of Christian Faith. The Christian revelation affirms that, since man is powerless to transcend his egocentricity with its inescapable historic doom, he must be lifted above it, which is what God has done for mankind by His incarnation in Jesus Christ, by Himself entering history as human being in Jesus of Nazareth.

The only possible alternative to Christian Faith, if one is to be faithful to the facts of history, is despair—sheer, black, utter, final despair. Belief in Christianity or Despair—these are the only realist alternatives. The universe means Christ—or nothing. This is the ultimate issue in human thought, once we accept the fact and meaning of the radical impotence of human nature. That issue can only be *evaded* or avoided by taking refuge in some intermediate illusion, which, however, the future will inevitably

destroy. It is almost a law of history that the illusions of to-day wither under the pressure of the facts of to-morrow. The air-raid shelters of 1939, which stood up to the one-ton bombs of 1939, crumbled under the weight of the 12,000 pounders of 1945. What shelter will protect from the atom bomb? The facts of historic progress grow heavier and heavier, which means that it becomes progressively more difficult to construct new illusions that will effectively cushion the mind against the blast of accumulating historic fact. Men will not believe for ever in the perfectibility of human nature, in the inevitability of progress. You cannot fool all the people all the time. Indeed, the Renaissance faith in an inevitable progress towards a secular Utopia is already cracking. Like a little golden cockerel, it has strutted the dunghill of European history for some four centuries. But the atomic bomb, among other things, is silencing its cock-a-doodle-do. "Current negativism for the future, *the virtual collapse of the idea of inevitable progress*, is not going to be easily remedied."<sup>1</sup> Why try to remedy it? Its abandonment will bring our generation nearer to recreative, emancipating faith. The final facing of this abysmal issue—Christianity or Despair—will do more than anything else for the security and welfare of human society even in this world—to say nothing of the next.

But men will not rest finally in despair, in utter, abysmal nihilism. Human proclivity to breed illusions is proof enough of that fact. Illusion is partly a testimony to man's insistence on having a faith. It is also a testimony, partly, to man's inveterate preference for combining faith with comfort. But when comfort becomes finally impossible—as it most surely will—men will turn to faith and to Christian

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Journey Home*, p. 13 (italics in the text). John Murray. *A Mass-Observation Report on Demobilization*. The authors of this valuable Report imply that faith in inevitable progress can be restored, which is evidence how deep-rooted secular assumptions are.

Faith (since history will eliminate alternatives), *however fantastic Christian Faith may appear to be at present to the purely secular mind*. When men reach the point of despair they do not stand on philosophical ceremony. They do not, face to face with dire disaster, begin by demanding of their saviours that they shall be rationally consistent. The first thing they ask is to be saved from impending doom. And subsequent experience of the faith that lifts them out of doom may reveal in it a hitherto unsuspected rationality. Let men but come face to face with the final issue, and the criteria of contemporary secular humanism will be revealed as the trivialities they essentially are. To that final issue—Christianity or Despair—egocentric human history is most surely driving mankind. "Man was born to be redeemed" (Forsyth).

Once, then, we realize that man stands in need of redemption, Christian Faith will wear a new aspect. Its whole system of belief is implied in the need for redemption. The *pons assinorum* of the modern, secularized mind is this recognition of the need to be redeemed. Once that is comprehended, Christian Faith fits the resulting situation as a glove fits the hand. This is what G. K. Chesterton so brilliantly described in his *Orthodoxy*.<sup>1</sup> "It (Christianity) not only goes right about things, but it goes wrong (if one may say so) exactly where the things go wrong. Its plan suits the secret irregularities, and expects the unexpected. It is simple about the simple truth; but it is stubborn about the subtle truth. It will admit that a man has two hands; it will not admit (though all the Modernists wail to it) the obvious deduction that he has two hearts." What, more than anything else, has made Christianity incredible (in the literal sense) to the modern mind is its violation of the

<sup>1</sup> Vide Chap. VI, *The Paradox of Christianity*. As a piece of Christian apologetic, *Orthodoxy* still stands supreme.

modern man's deepest assumption—the power of man to solve his own basic problem, to achieve complete happiness by his own effort, to create an earthly paradise by social development. The complete denial of that assumption by Christian Faith has been the most important factor in the process of making Christianity unacceptable to the modern man.

The maturing crisis of our civilization—which has not yet reached its climax—should dispose, and is disposing, our generation to a new attitude to Christian Faith. The religion which our too confident secularists so gaily buried, the funeral rites of which they so obviously enjoyed to perform, is undeniably beginning to exercise some attractive power. The first step towards the recovery of Christian Faith as the dominating intellectual and spiritual force of an age is to perceive its relevance to the current situation. Christianity is concerned with a living, contemporary problem. Its interest is not antiquarian, but modern, the here-and-now anxiety, confusion and frustration of the peoples of our urban civilization. It is most urgently, and rationally, relevant in its interpretation of the stubborn contradictions of social progress. It does not shrink from the grim fate of sinful human nature, since, at the same time, it holds in its hands the power to save it from its fate.

It has been necessary to demonstrate the tragically intimate relevance of Christian Faith to the situation in which the modern man finds himself, since it is obvious that men will not submit to a religion or a philosophy which they deem to be remote from or irrelevant to their problems and needs. To sense once again that Christianity is dead on the spot, so to say, is the first step towards the re-Christianization of our society. This is the task which the later development in theology is performing. In the execution of that task, theology is being aided by powerful allies, even if

also they are unwilling allies, such as the psychology of the Unconscious; by what I have termed the sociology of the half-way house; and by the later schools of historians, of whom Mr. Arnold Toynbee is so brilliant and powerful an example. Above all, theology is being backed by the most powerful ally of all, by the process of historic development. No armament is so mighty as that of the event. It is events, more than all else, that are writing the most devastating demonstration of the grim truth of Biblical, Apostolic and Catholic Christianity.

In this lies the only hope of any renewal of our sadly shattered civilization. I do not mean, in this context, the far grander, vaster and profounder certainty that Jesus Christ and His Gospel are the sole hope of the eternal soul of man. That is a magnificent certainty to every convinced Christian, a certainty which transcends every doubt and anxiety and oppression that arises from the historic situation to trouble and disturb the Christian mind. But in the immediate context I mean something much more specific and concrete, something of much narrower application.

The point of disintegration already reached by European civilization invests Christian belief—belief in the sense of something being taken for granted, as belief in human omnipotence has been for so long taken for granted—with survival value and function. Recovery of Christian belief, in other words, has now become an indispensable sociological condition of the survival of Europe *as a civilization of persons*. I cannot see any other influence or power in contemporary life that can arrest the deep drift to totalitarian society, to the conquest of Europe by the mass-man. In the irony of history, a faith which is essentially eschatological, other-worldly, is emerging as a necessary factor in the survival of civilization in this world. For five centuries

the modern man has been blindly squandering a most precious heritage. Will he come to sanity in time? A fateful question! Here is the challenge of the Christian faith to the modern man, and on his response to it depends the survival of the Europe we have known, a Europe which, with all its defects, has, nevertheless, been a society in which the individual was free to be person and to become more fully personality.